

A cosmic background image featuring a deep blue and purple space filled with numerous stars and a prominent, glowing, filamentary structure resembling a nebula or galaxy, with yellow and orange highlights.

# SEARCHING FOR WORLD PEACE

**THROUGH BUDDHISM  
AND OTHER RELIGIONS:**  
TRANSIENT PHENOMENA  
and ETERNAL PHENOMENA

有為法與無為法

Edward P.H. Woo

# **Searching for World Peace through Buddhism and Other Religions:**

## **Transient Phenomena and Eternal Phenomena**

**Searching for World Peace through Buddhism and Other Religions:  
Transient Phenomena and Eternal Phenomena**

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Edward P.H. Woo

Centre for the Study of World Peace and Religions

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# Searching for World Peace through Buddhism and Other Religions

How is it possible?

Understand what is a Religion? In this book, we have suggested two definitions for the term “Religion”. A thorough understanding of the important distinction between the two definitions will help to find peace.

Understand how Buddhism distinguishes between two situations, one is referred to as transient phenomena and the other is referred to as eternal phenomena.

The Christian faith believes that God exists in trinity, that God has created the universe and everything therein and God is eternal.

The Muslim faith believes that there is no god but God; and God is eternal.

The Diamond Sutra is generally known to contain authentic teachings of Buddhism. The Diamond Sutra has the insight that Religious faiths are different amongst different people. It says that all the sages and the highly respected philosophers everywhere are different because their understanding of matters in eternity are different.

The truth about eternity has never been scientifically proven and we believe it is beyond human intelligence to understand what is in eternity.

The Diamond Sutra has therefore provided man with a simple explanation for the differences in different faiths.

The suggestion that Buddhism is conducive to peace is attributed to the revelation in the Diamond Sutra when it states that all sages and highly respected philosophers are different from one another because they hold different views with respect to eternity.



## Preface

In this publication<sup>1</sup>, with ideas further developed from my earlier Chinese book, 有為法與無為法 (The Transient Aspects of Life and Teachings of Eternity), I would like to apply a macro perspective to analyze and share with readers a new proposal that attempts to resolve the religiously triggered opposition and even antagonism between people.

I contend that religion is the main cause behind paradoxes in contemporary society. When we talk about paradoxes brought about by “religion”, we must clarify what “religion” is. The first chapter of this book offers a lucid definition of “religion”. Once we understand what religion is, we will have the opportunity to explore things from the unique angle of Buddhism and discover that all the religious devotees are looking for the Truth and should not discriminate against each other. But what is the reality?

Christians believe that they have found the Truth, the Almighty God. For them the existence of God is the fundamental truth. Is there any scientific evidence of that? None. On one hand, we have no scientific proof to attest that God exists; on the other hand, we have no proof to refute the existence of God. The current circumstance of believers of different religions, including those of Christians, Catholics, and Muslims, can be described as looking for the Truth at best.

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<sup>1</sup> The current English version is made possible with the translation of Dr. Yanlong Guo.

We ought to know that if the god revered in one type of monotheism (e.g. Islam) were true, then the god worshipped in other monotheistic religions such as Catholicism or Protestantism would be false. In that case, religious adherents of a false god would be left with nothing but a road to hell. Hence, devotees of one theocratic religion could not possibly dispel misunderstandings toward followers of other theocratic religions or atheists, but gradually formulate opposite and antagonistic minds.

Upon the publication of *Searching for World Peace through Buddhism and Other Religions: Transient Phenomena and Eternal Phenomena*, I intend to interpret two aspects and keynotes worth pondering.

First, “all the religions are still striving for the Truth”, and avoid by all means the statement that some religion has discovered it. I enter from “transient phenomena” (conditioned phenomena) and “eternal phenomena” (unconditioned phenomena)<sup>2</sup> in Buddhist learning, in order for readers to recognize the reason why everyone is searching for the Truth. When any religion stresses the truthfulness of its own theory, the discriminating mind that differentiates truth and falsity emerges. The discriminating mind is not only harmful but also not beneficial to a harmonious society; the method to eliminate it is to acknowledge the fact that everyone is searching for the Truth. I hope that devout religious believers and atheist scholars around the world could understand that every religion is

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<sup>2</sup> “Transient phenomena” (有為法) can be described as the transient aspects of matters which, including life, have a beginning and an end. “Eternal phenomena” (無為法) can be described as the permanent aspects of eternity.

looking for the Truth; if so, adherents would spontaneously realize that we are all going along the same path. Since time immemorial, there has been a lack of tolerance among religions, which has not improved over thousands of years, because the discriminating mind readily leads to disagreements.

Using the Buddhist teaching of “transient phenomena” (conditioned phenomena) and “eternal phenomena” (unconditioned phenomena) to analyse things, I expect to make the necessary circumstances intelligible and luminous. Since the Crusades that campaigned a thousand years ago to this day, religiously oriented war has never ended. I hope that we could swiftly establish peacefulness through eliminating the discriminating mind. This reminds me of a verse in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*: “A light can wipe off the darkness of thousands years; wisdom can eliminate folly of centuries”<sup>3</sup>.

Second, by presenting an accessible practice of cultivation, I take this opportunity to share my learning of Buddhism with a general audience. The number of Buddhist canons is so immense that eighty-four thousand permutations of the [Buddhist] teaching are expounded, with each one of them being capable of assisting the practitioner to accomplish true reward. I especially talk about a simple way.

According to the *Sutra of the Bodhisattva Precepts* quoted in the chapter on Sitting Meditation of the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, “my original nature is originally pure. My good and virtuous friend, in your meditation you will see for yourself

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<sup>3</sup> 六祖壇經: “一燈能除千年暗, 一智能滅萬年愚。”

the purity of your original nature. Through self-cultivation and positive steps you take, you will naturally achieve Buddhahood”.<sup>4</sup> (For more explicit details on this point, please refer to Chapter 6).

From “transient phenomena” (conditioned phenomena) and “eternal phenomena” (unconditioned phenomena), it comes to the realization that any major religion could contribute to world peace, as will be deeply illustrated in this book. I earnestly request readers to support the idea that advances the harmony of the world, and to introduce it to religious circles and atheists.

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<sup>4</sup> 菩薩戒經: “我本性元自清淨.善知識, 於念念中自見本性清淨, 自修, 自行, 自成佛道.” (六祖壇經坐禪品第五)

# Part I

## Introduction

### Guide to Reading the Book

There are three focal points in this Book: 1) the concept of religion, 2) basic knowledge of Buddhism, and 3) religious thinking's adverse impact on contemporary society and how to address it. Here is the simple fact: the world is in total chaos. It is a matter of opinion whether or not the chaotic world is correlated with religion. If we were to follow the traditional way when dealing with problems caused by religions, our chance to resolve them would be slender.

This book analyses the reasons why religion has generated a variety of paradoxes and proposes a solution to this problem. It aims to enlighten people by breaking them away from the hold of discriminating minds (Skt. *citta-vikalpa*) and by harmonizing human relations. In order to understand the method offered by the author, the reader shall thoroughly understand the definition of "religion" in the first place, which is clearly elucidated in Chapter 1.

I believe that three types of readers will find the book's arguments particularly illuminating to read. These readers include:

- 1) Buddhists
- 2) Believers of theocratic religions, such as Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims
- 3) Atheists

What are the arguments presented in this book? To allow readers to conveniently comprehend my overall thinking, I have summarized the main tenets that are elaborated in each of the chapters.

### **Understanding “Conditioned Phenomena” and “Unconditioned Phenomena”**

Buddhism categorizes the myriad sorts of things into “conditioned phenomena” (Skt. *saṃskṛta-dharma*) (“有為法”) and “unconditioned phenomena” (Skt. *asaṃskṛtā-dharma*) (“無為法”).

There is an alternative way to explain “conditioned phenomena” (transient phenomena) and “unconditioned phenomena” (eternal phenomena).

**“Conditioned phenomena”** (有為法) can be described as the transient aspects of matters which, including life, have a beginning and an end.

**“Unconditioned phenomena”** (無為法) can be described as the permanent aspects of eternity.

Conditioned phenomena has been incessantly and deeply explored in the sciences, and their achievements are universally recognized. In contrast, unconditioned phenomena denote the eternal and absolute condition. I consider that unconditioned phenomena go far beyond human intelligence and can only exist in our imagination. No one knows for certain what

unconditioned phenomena contain. This is true regardless of whether a person is a theologian, member of the clergy, a scientist, or a layman. Section 7 of the *Diamond Sutra* states: “all sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity.”<sup>1</sup> At this moment in the twenty-first century, this recognition is full of insights, because:

The Christian God worshipped by his followers refers to the Holy Father and Jesus, who engage with eternity. Muslims believe in the One and Unique Allah. The two religions hold different views toward everlasting unconditioned phenomena. Conversely, Buddhism does not provide any instruction on the issue. To me, “all sages and highly respected scholars” that the *Diamond Sutra* refers should cover the reverend priests of the Christians faith, the imam of Islam and the Buddhist teachers. Different understandings of unconditioned phenomena result in distinctions between religions, which should all be treated with equal respect.

### **Perceiving Unconditioned Phenomena**

Buddhism demonstrates subtle and superb knowledge about unconditioned phenomena (eternal phenomena). Regarding the eternal condition of unconditioned phenomena, Buddhist sutras do not give any explanation; on the contrary, the *Diamond Sutra* points out that there is fundamentally “no Dharma to be explained”. It is commonly understood that Buddha preached sutras and scriptures for forty-nine years after attaining enlightenment; but Section 21 of the *Diamond Sutra*

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<sup>1</sup> 金剛經第 7 分: “一切聖賢, 皆以無為法而有差別。”

asserts: “Anybody who would say such things as ‘The Tathāgata (Buddha) has taught the Dharma would misrepresent me, on account of wrong learning’”<sup>2</sup>. Why does Buddha declare that he never teaches the Dharma? Since human conduct and morality belongs to conditioned phenomena, it is therefore not surprising at all for Buddha to have taught something. When it comes to unconditioned phenomena, however, there is nothing to be taught. Should not humans know that the eternal condition, namely, unconditioned phenomena, is incomprehensible to our intellectual capacity?

I would like to discuss a question worthy of consideration: What circumstances lead to the nothingness taught by the Buddha? The only reasonable and conceivable explanation in the imagination is that human intelligence is limited and fatuous, and worldly languages and means of communication are possibly lacking in the capacity to convey the dynamics of unconditioned existence. Therefore, no Dharma can be taught.

### **Religion and the Truth**

Every religion believes that it has found the Truth; yet, permanent Truth is exactly unconditioned Dharma, which is something humans can never attest to. Since the Truth is un-attestable, shall we humbly admit that we are still searching for it? If that is the case, world peace would come in the near future.

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<sup>2</sup> 金剛經第 21 分: “若人言如來有所說法, 即為謗佛, 不能解我所說故。”



## **What are the paradoxes of religion?**

When exploring the truthfulness of things, in other words, investigating conditioned phenomena, scientists generally share and collaborate with each other. Conversely, when exploring unconditioned phenomena, people always tend to be opinionated and narrow-minded. Missionaries and sermonizers constantly maintain that they have found the True God. Nevertheless, is there any True God? Who is the True God? What characteristics does he possess? What are his likes and dislikes? That no one is able to provide reasonable answers to such questions is paradoxical.

For humans to achieve a harmonious world requires putting aside our prejudices, acknowledging the absence of scientific and dialectical methods in studying unconditioned phenomena, and respecting those who simultaneously walk on the road of pursuing the Truth. This kind of thinking is completely opposite to the thinking of those who are obstinate and narrow-minded.

## **Opinions of atheist scholars**

Atheists refute religion completely. This seemingly extreme view is caused by their misunderstanding of the term “religion”. In effect, all the mainstream religious thinking guide people toward benevolence. Antithetical oppositions have been created, as whether or not the everlasting and unchanging conditions exist is not testable. The more devout the believers, the riskier it is that conflicts will flare up between those with differing religious views. Consequently, atheists feel that religious thinking endangers society. The remedy I offer now is that one has to wholeheartedly keep on looking for the Truth. While understanding that the recognition of unconditioned

phenomena exceeds human intelligence, what harm does it do to encourage religious believers to continue seeking the Truth?

### **Views of theocratic religious believers**

How do believers of theocratic religions see the world? For them, it is the creator who creates and manipulates heaven, earth, and everything in the world. When one encounters difficulties walking life's road, one needs to be aware of whether one's conduct abides in God's will; everyone can communicate with God and live with his blessing.

### **Buddhist view**

There is no creator in Buddhism. For Buddhists, the being of a creator does not really matter, as all states of existence result from causes (Skt. *hetu*) and conditions (Skt. *pratyaya*). Buddhists believe in karma, and in everyone having inherent self nature. Originally pure, our inherent nature is defiled and polluted because we long for the conditions we once perceived. We will be able to attain enlightenment, as long as we purify and return to our own nature and act in accordance with the true principle.

### **Searching for the Truth**

Regardless of the religious inclinations of the reader, he or she shall realize the importance of the search for the Truth, and shall facilitate conditions to help everyone attentively search for the Truth, inasmuch as he or she regards that there exists a further form of existence after the end of life. The method is to diminish the discriminating mind; this is the first step for a peaceful coexistence among religions.

# Chapter 1

## What is Religion?

All religions and religious theories are created by human intelligence. To understand what religion is, we have to begin by analyzing the reasons behind the emergence of religion. To achieve this, we must understand why religions exist.

To what extent, if at all, do modern humans share anything with our primitive ancestors in terms of mindset? It is reasonable to believe that we share with our primitive ancestors an instinctual capacity that naturally distinguishes right from wrong, which inclines us to avoid committing mistakes. This common disposition shared by moderns and ancients is what we call 'conscience'.

Notions about right and wrong perhaps differ in various periods and in different places. These differences have evolved from our thinking, which is influenced and constituted by our cultural legacies.

When we grew up, our contact with people who took care of us, parents in particular, influence and mold our notions and standards of truth and falsehood. Take the institution of marriage for example. Most countries nowadays practice monogamy, which inherently regards extramarital relationship as immoral. And yet, the conduct of early humans should hardly be held to this moral standard. Tracing back history, slavery was once legal, and prohibitions about incestuous relations are far

from universal.

Ancients and moderns share common interests and desires. Both are aware of the limitations of life and have thoughts and expectations about the length and extension of life as well as conditions after death. I believe that everyone is curious about answers to these questions.

At some historical stage, people began to conceptualize thoughts about the afterlife and to imagine possible experiences after death and to reflect on what behaviors during life might affect conditions in the afterlife. Out of this same impulse, religious and philosophical concepts began to be formulated around these ideas of afterlife.

Ancient people sometimes would have been terrified by natural phenomena, such as lightning and thunder, which they experienced but did not understand. They would imagine legendary stories to explain such phenomena. For some, there must be a creator at work. This can be a logical theory, as nothing in this material world exists without a creative process. People who adhere to this logic believe in God, a Creator, or a multitude of deities as creators. They further surmise that God naturally controls whatever He creates. For example, He expresses his discontent toward human beings through lightning and thunder or any manner of natural disasters.

Our knowledge system constantly evolves. Having mastered scientific knowledge, humans tend to negate previous beliefs and discard banal notions that are in conflict with science. However, the idea of God creating Heaven, Earth, and the

myriad things is deeply ingrained in Western thinking. Many Westerners believe that we all have to accept this perspective; according to their view, recognizing that there is a God who is the Creator is fundamental to our thinking. In other words, we must always remind ourselves that God created the Universe and He has been watching our practices.

That being said, we still have some room for adopting other ways of thinking. Whenever we talk about the process of creating something, our conventional mindset might feel the need to imagine a Creator putting raw materials together to assemble an object. We also hear Catholics say that “God can do whatever He wishes”.

Nevertheless, we shall not ignore the possibility that some deity might have set out a fair and perfect institution or system to regulate the formation and evolution of myriad things in the world. Under this flawless system, everything can come to life, and there is no need for gods to create anything and watch things individually, including the daily lives of humans. Perhaps all of us, as well as other forms of life, live within this grand, impeccable system. I boldly claim that this is exactly what Buddhism defines.

## Questioning the Definition of Religion

According to *The Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary* (OALD thereafter), religion is:

1. The belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader.
2. One of the systems of faith that are based on the belief in the existence of a particular god or gods, or in the teachings of a spiritual leader.

Similar to other Western scholarly connotations of religion, this definition is built upon the premise that there exists a god-like creator who governs the universe and everything within it. The theological circles of Christianity generally adopt this definition without question. For example, in his introductory book to Buddhism, Damien Keown asserts that “Most people would say that religion has something to do with belief in God. God, in turn, is understood as a Supreme Being who created the world and the creatures in it”.<sup>1</sup>

Buddhists cannot possibly accept this definition, which does not acknowledge Buddhism as a religion. Buddhist followers do not believe in the existence of creator, nor are they convinced by the hypothesis that a supernatural power controls everything. In order to view Buddhism as one kind of religion, we must revise the dominant Western definition or use another approach to interpret religion.

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<sup>1</sup> Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

The prominent scholar Ninian Smart articulates seven dimensions to measure whether one school of thought constitutes as religion. The seven dimensions are:

1. forms and orders of ceremonies;
2. experiential and emotional;
3. narrative and mythic;
4. social and Institutional;
5. ethical and legal;
6. doctrinal and philosophical;
7. material.

If we apply the above measurements to evaluate a school of thought, it becomes clear that Buddhism is a religion (as is Confucianism). What is lacking in Professor Smart's definition of religion is discourse about afterlife. Consequently, I consider that the state of being after one's death is an essential prerequisite to define religion.

Through examining the term 'religion', we get to see how Chinese understand it. The Chinese translation of the English term is 宗教 (*zong jiao*); 宗 (*zong*) means origin, while 教 (*jiao*) connotes teaching. Therefore, 宗教 (*zong jiao*) [religion] is a teaching that describes the origins of human existence.

Religions originated with differing reasons around the world. Whereas some were derived from fear, others evolved out of curiosity. Our curiosity and superstition about natural phenomena generated hope or fear, which in turn initiated religions. However, acknowledging the existence of a creator is not a common characteristic shared by all religions, nor does it constitute a set of beliefs as religion. This point seemingly

reveals the distinctive understanding of religion that distinguishes the views of Eastern and Western cultures.

*OALD* considers Buddhism as one of the major world religions. As a result, many Westerners reckon that Buddhist practitioners also worship some god, or many gods (e.g. Buddha and Bodhisattvas). But this is simply not true, as no creator or master of the universe can be found in Buddhist scriptures.

Because of this, Buddhism is not a religion in the traditional sense. If we would like to understand Buddhism as a religion, we must seek a religious definition that incorporates Buddhism.

### **Religion and Philosophy**

In order to locate the true connotations of religion, we ought to study the distinctions between religion and philosophy. *OALD* defines 'philosophy' as: 1) the study of ideas about the nature and the meaning of existence; 2) a particular system of thought based on such study. In the imagination, humans could have three different spiritual levels:

- 1) We do not believe in the existence of a soul, and thereupon the knowledge of good and evil. Conscience is not a concern. A person after death is ashes to ashes, and thus does not exist in any form of afterlife. In this concept, different people have different behavioral norms; humans are governed by an animal or brutish nature.
- 2) People know how to distinguish good from bad, and understand what to do and what not to do. This mindset tallies with Confucian philosophy.



- 3) People believe that the human spirit is unremitting, even after bodily death. Under such notion, religious beliefs provide a behavioral norm in society.

The second level can be enunciated through the Confucian teaching of the eight virtues: Filial Piety, Sibling Harmony, Loyalty, Trustworthiness, Propriety, Sacrifice, Integrity, and Sense of Shame. As the basis of Chinese culture, the eight virtues receive great admiration and praise from other religious groups. Nonetheless, Confucianism makes no mention of the state of being after death. We learn these virtues not because they are attached to or promoted by any specific religion.

Atheism is located in between the first and second levels. Scientists wonder, without religious teachings, would our morals rapidly decay and not be able to discern right from wrong? People who have grown up in a Chinese society enriched with cultural traditions generally do not raise such a question. It is fundamental for every child in the society to recite the Three-Character Classic that begins with “people at birth, are naturally good”.

Religion indicates the third spiritual level, asserting the existence of souls after death. As a type of philosophical thought, religion outlines how best to act in the world and live a good life; and, presumably, how doing so will aid the person in attaining a happy destination after death.

Here we are able to see the distinction between religion and philosophy: religion considers what is going to happen after the

termination of this life, whereas philosophy does not. Aside from providing an understanding about human experiences after death, religion teaches us about how to behave. Philosophy also offers a guide to how to behave in society, but its guidance is not concerned with the next life.

### **A New Definition of Religion**

Can we provide a fairly objective account for religion? Let us take a look at the one below:

Religion is a philosophy or teaching developed from the belief that the spiritual nature of a person continues to exist after the death of the body and a reward or a punishment is accorded depending on his or her behavior; and through which philosophy or teaching, there are certain guidelines devised for people to follow.

Many who have grown up in Western society might be unfamiliar with this definition. But only this definition could accommodate Buddhism in the array of religions, including Daoism, Hinduism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Judaism, and Islam.

With the new definition of religion provided above, we see that there are only two forms of religious beliefs in the world: the first stresses the last judgment by God; the second does not believe in God's judgment, but maintains that humans are entrapped in a chain of causes and effects. The first type encompasses Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, and Islam. The second type includes Buddhism, Daoism, and Hinduism.

This definition does not include Confucianism (some call it the Cult of Confucius). This is because Confucianism is not concerned with the afterlife. Neither the Chinese government nor the public sees Confucianism as a religion. In contemporary China, the State Administration for Religious Affairs under the State Council oversees religious affairs and issues for the People's Republic of China. It recognizes five religions: Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. Confucianism is not recognized as a religion. If we ask any student with some understanding of traditional Chinese culture, he or she would agree that Confucianism is not a religion. But the difference between philosophy and religion has never been seriously discussed. Without a clear definition of religion, we would hardly be able to decide whether to take Confucianism as a religion or not.

The fresh definition of religion I have outlined is probably strange to many living in Western societies. However, it will help solve some important questions, one of which is useful in determining whether a set of religious doctrines belongs to a cult, philosophy, or authentic religion. We have to evaluate whether Buddhism is a religion, otherwise we could not begin discussing the religious value of Buddhism.

The correct and concrete definition of 'religion' is extremely crucial and pressing. Only when it is perfectly justifiable can religion be widely discussed and applied to our ordinary lives.

In Western societies, the law describes religious affairs as charitable activities. But if we adopt the OALD definition, then

Buddhism is not a religion. In such a case, the law would not allow any charitable donations to promote and develop Buddhism in the West or in Hong Kong.

In their writing, some Western scholars mention that many people feel bitterly disappointed about religion, and try to avoid it. Other scholars sense that religions are being challenged because a suitable definition of religion has yet to be found. If we accept the new definition of religion that I propose here, I suggest that religion as one branch of philosophy can be studied by people around the globe. Even though some people may feel the urge to disaffiliate from a particular religion, I am confident that I can provide a clear statement about religion that is not biased toward any perspective. We shall not have to cut ourselves off from religion; rather we can actively study the positive and negative influences of religion.

How should we view religion in this twenty-first century with highly developed information technology? Everyone has the absolute freedom to believe or negate the existence of a 'creator'. But no matter whether a person believes in a creator or not, religion unquestionably offers a manual of conduct, regardless of its truthfulness. I would like to stress again that it is only when we understand the authentic meanings of 'religion' that we can study it with objectivity. I hope readers will solidly comprehend the new definition of religion in this book, but that they will also feel confident to voice their own opinions.

According to the new definition of religion, all religions share the same purpose that they teach people about how to attain

an ideal destiny or new life. When followers of various religions realize that each and every religion pursues the same object, they will understand that religions are not mutually exclusive to each other, which will lead to a harmonious world. If my new definition of religion is espoused, there will be the amazing result!

### **Recognize the significance of the definition of religion**

This book has provided the following definition of “religion”:

“Religion is a philosophy or teaching developed from the belief that the spiritual nature of a person continues to exist after the death of the body and a reward or a punishment is accorded depending on his or her behavior; and through which philosophy or teaching, there are certain guidelines devised for people to follow.”

(Definition 1)

But there are some who see the definition of religion as the following:

“Religion is a belief in an eternal state. For example, the existence of a creator. The creator creates the universe and rules and punishment. The purpose of establishing a religion is to protect this belief and guard the interests of the fellow worshippers, and their freedom to believe, enabling them to further spread this belief. ” (Definition 2)

Definition 1 is able to promote world peace, as it does not involve the element of self-interest (to protect) and therefore does not cause conflicts.

Although the latter definition, Definition 2 is strictly speaking also correct, it is not advised to be adopted, (as self interests exist in this definition). It is only reasonable that religious individuals would seek to protect the interest of his or her religious group. If the latter definition is adopted, conflicts among different religions would be unavoidable. In this world nowadays, the cause for chaos in many places arises from the need to protect certain interests.

## Chapter 2

### What is Buddhism?

#### What are the Main Ideas in Buddhism?

Buddhism is a profound and comprehensive philosophy that investigates the truth about human beings and the universe. Similar to other religions, Buddhism explains the conditions of being after death. Buddhists believe in rebirth following death, even as an animal or other forms of life, unless the dead ascends to Heaven or descends to Hell.

Just as the previous chapter discussed, “Religion is a philosophy or a teaching developed from the belief that the spiritual nature of a person continues to exist after the death of the body and a reward or a punishment would be accorded depending on his or her behavior; and through which philosophy or teaching, there are certain guidelines devised for people to follow.” Because Buddhism conforms to all of the above conditions, it is undoubtedly a religion.

Prince Siddhartha, the founder of the Buddhist religion who was active in India around 2,500 years ago, abdicated the throne, left the royal palace, and set out to seek enlightenment. After achieving enlightenment, he was revered as Buddha Shakyamuni. Buddha is a title given to a person who has attained full awakening or enlightenment. A buddha is not a god. The goal of Buddha Shakyamuni’s teaching is to demonstrate to the interested persons his path to

enlightenment. He did not require adherents to believe in miracles. As a result, there is no need for Buddhist learning to be riddled with superstition.

Whereas all the religions expound the conditions of human beings after death, Confucianism does not; for this reason, it should not be counted as a religion. Many scholars argue that Confucianism, together with Daoism, and Buddhism, represent the three schools or a harmonious aggregate of the “Three Teachings”. Some foreign scholars mistakenly take Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism as three religions. But, these are just three schools of thought - not three religions. Due to various historical factors, Western scholars never sufficiently examine the correct definition of religion, and thus deem Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism as three main Chinese religions.

Christianity formulates an unambiguous concept about the conditions of human beings after death. Each one of us stands before the judgment of God, who replays each individual's entire life in order to determine where the soul is to spend the rest of eternity, be it Heaven, Earth, or Purgatory. Some Christians might raise the following questions: If Buddhist followers do not believe in the existence of God, the creator of the Universe, then who will be the judge of good and evil? Are humans responsible for not committing evils, but doing all that is good? What will serve as a substitute for God's judgment? We will find answers to these questions in the discussions below.



## Two Core Concepts of Buddhism

What is at the core of Buddhism? The single most fitting word to describe the theme of Buddhist belief is *enlightenment*<sup>1</sup>. The next question is, what do we know after our enlightenment? Answering these two questions will bring about two crucial principles of Buddhism, with which we will begin to see the central theme of Buddhism. These two principles are:

1. The recognition of intrinsic nature.
2. The relationship between cause and consequence.

### 1. The Recognition of Intrinsic Nature (Self-nature)

The recognition of intrinsic nature can be articulated through the phrase of “enlightening one's mind, and seeing one's Buddha-nature” (*ming xin jian xing* 明心見性).

Ming (明) = to illuminate or to clarify  
Xin (心) = mind  
Jian (見) = understand  
Xing (性) = intrinsic nature

“To know one's fundamental mind, to see one's Buddha-nature”, as a Buddhist saying goes. Buddhist philosophy espouses that all sentient beings possess thusness or intrinsic nature, which is pure and benevolent.<sup>2</sup> Intrinsic nature as the intelligence of Buddha<sup>3</sup> was originally possessed by all people, but hindered

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<sup>1</sup> 覺悟.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Intrinsic nature’ (自性), (Skt. *svabhāva*) is also called original nature (*prakṛti*), self-nature, original reality, or thusness (*tathatā*).

<sup>3</sup> An enlightened person is called a ‘buddha.’ According to Buddhism, everyone has the chance to attain enlightenment by removing craving, aversion, and ignorance.

by craving, aversion, ignorance, pride, and doubt since time immemorial. These obstacles are originated from delusive conceptualization, discriminative mind, and lasting attachment. According to Buddhist teaching, all sentient beings return to intrinsic nature through cultivation.

If we can rediscover our ‘intrinsic nature’, we will be able to change delusion into awakening, and keep to the correct path. This is the exact purpose of our Buddhist learning. Without recovering our ‘intrinsic nature’, we would always be living in befuddlement. However, many critics of Buddhism do not see through this point. The leading opponent of Buddhism Saint-Hilaire once wrote, “In Greek philosophy, Socrates and Plato have won imperishable glory by giving to the conception of goodness its real place in the soul of man, in the world, and in God; and the fire they kindled has continued to burn and throw more and more light among us. In Buddhism, on the contrary, not a gleam of this divine flame has shown itself, not a single spark has flashed out; and the sun of intelligence, as Plato calls it, has never enlightened those of the Buddhist world”.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, this author did not realize the existence of ‘intrinsic nature’. One of the most influential Mahayana sutras of Buddhism, *The Great Means Expansive Buddha Flower Adornment Sutra* (Skt: *Buddhāvataṃsaka-mahāvaipulya-sūtra*) records Shakyamuni Buddha’s first sermon after his enlightenment, declaring “How strange, how strange! All sentient beings are vested with the wisdom and virtuous

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<sup>4</sup> Saint-Hilaire, J. Barthelemy, *The Buddha and His Religion*. (New Delhi: Rupa Co, 2002).

characteristics of Buddha, but are hindered from enlightenment by delusive conceptualization and attachment”.<sup>5</sup>

In another Buddhist scripture, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, Buddha similarly states that “All sentient beings had originally been Buddha”.<sup>6</sup> One’s immaculate ‘intrinsic nature’, initially possessed by all sentient beings, could be hindered and obstructed when one’s thought is moving in the mind to discriminate between he, you, and I, or when one’s conduct is enslaved by selfish interests.

The understanding of and the possibility of restoring ‘intrinsic nature’ is at the core of Buddhism. It is possible to enlighten one’s mind and to see one’s Buddha-nature through the sequential cultivation of eradicating craving, aversion, and ignorance. To attain enlightenment is to successfully remove the three basic afflictions. When a person awakens his mind and sees his Buddha-nature, the person will have thorough and perfect awareness of all the phenomena of the universe and of our lives. He will have accomplished Buddhahood. Buddhist practitioners say that one directly accomplishes Buddhahood when one sees one’s own nature. The same idea has been reiterated in many other Buddhist scriptures. It would be a great mistake not to realize this idea during the process of Buddhist learning.

The goal of Buddhist learning is to attain enlightenment, to change delusion into awakening, and to escape suffering and attain happiness. This means that:

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<sup>5</sup> 大方廣佛華嚴經: “奇哉奇哉! 一切眾, 皆有如來智慧德相, 但因妄想執著而不證得。”

<sup>6</sup> 圓覺經: “一切眾生本來是佛。”

1. 'Intrinsic nature' is vested in human beings.
2. The afflictive hindrances of intrinsic nature that are caused by craving, aversion, and ignorance brings about suffering.
3. The way to eliminate suffering is to eradicate craving, aversion, and ignorance through the practices of morality, meditation, and wisdom. When we 'give away to help others, there should not be any link or attachment to other considerations'.<sup>7</sup> Through continuous practices in the light of this way, we will expand our mental capacity. We will come closer and closer to Buddhahood. When we gradually understand the truth of things, we will have naturally removed our suffering.

Some people think that the very purpose of life is to seek happiness. And yet the definition of happiness can be highly subjective. For many, wealth, fame, and glory are the main sources of happiness. Of course, we cannot possibly goad people into pursuing this kind of pleasure. I believe that *happiness*, as the meaning of life, must be understood as the happiness gained through changing delusion into awakening, and escaping suffering.

It is noticeable that a number of English manuscripts on Buddhism have portrayed the Four Noble Truths as the essence of Buddhist teaching. While understanding the Four Noble Truths is inherently important and necessary to every serious

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<sup>7</sup> 無所住行於布施.

Buddhist practitioner, these forms are meaningful only under the condition that our 'intrinsic nature' is restored. In other words, it would be a serious omission not to offer an explanation of 'intrinsic nature' in Buddhism, at the same time when Buddhism is to be acknowledged as a religion without God.

Can we eradicate the three afflictions - craving, aversion, and ignorance? In principle we can, but in reality barely anyone can fully achieve it. As long as we partially eliminate the three poisons, and decrease the attachment to an enduring, inherent self, egoism, and selfishness, we will be able to feel the joy through 'intrinsic nature' after the expansion of our mental capacity to some extent. In other words, only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches.

Enlightening one's mind, and seeing one's intrinsic nature will allow one to acquire true liberation (referred to as nirvana). Buddhist philosophy teaches us that we, and only we ourselves, are capable of realizing enlightenment. The Buddha is here to point us to the way of cultivation, but we have to walk it by ourselves.

Even some distinguished Professors of Buddhism have paid little attention to 'intrinsic nature'. During Scott London's interview, Professor Ninian Smart from the University of California, Santa Barbara stated that 'craving, aversion, and ignorance' are the major problems of human beings in the eyes of the Buddha. Although his statement is quite right, Professor Smart made no mention of intrinsic nature and the consequences of obstructing it.

Many eminent monks repeatedly teach us to watch our conduct. Examples include: “We must be compassionate”, “We must be sincere and enthusiastic when dealing with others”, “We must be patient”, and “Do not do to others what you would not like to be done to you”. These adages are surely correct, but many teachers outside Buddhism could speak similar words. People might be asking: What is most appealing and transcendental aspect of Buddhism? The answer is: Only when we comprehend the ‘intrinsic nature’ of humans, and regain it through cultivation could we appreciate the value of Buddhism. The perfectness of this ‘intrinsic nature’ is comparable to that of God understood in Christianity.

The charm of the idea of ‘intrinsic nature’ lies in the consummate intrinsic nature vested in every one of us that enables us to stay as close to perfection as we wish.

**An excerpt from a scholarly writing on ‘intrinsic nature’<sup>8</sup>:**

“What is the ultimate purpose of meditative practice? It is to enlighten one’s mind, and to see one’s Buddha-nature. What is the result of such practice? It is to penetrate through the basis of our existence, to get through with life and death, to transcend the triple realm without undergoing subsequent rebirth, to liberate self and others, and to universally benefit all beings. This is the ultimate goal of returning to intrinsic nature. In order to enlighten one’s mind and to see one’s intrinsic nature, one has to understand what mind-nature is, which is the

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<sup>8</sup> Fa Yi Buddhist Lodge (法雨精舍-法雨精舍思慮手冊: 參禪之目的).

originally pure mind of all sentient beings. Intrinsic nature also has variations in different branches of East Asian Buddhism, ranging from ‘Buddha-nature’, ‘thusness’, ‘thus-come’, ‘one’s true nature’ or ‘pure Dharma-body’ in Chan Buddhism, ‘manifested from one’s own mind’, or ‘perfectly accomplished nature of reality’ in Yogācāra Buddhism, ‘Dharma-body in a pure land’, or the ‘pure land of eternally tranquil light’ in the Pure Land School, ‘true insight’ in the Three Treatise school, ‘the original intrinsic nature’ or ‘adamantine jewel precepts’ in the Vinaya School, ‘the precious likeness of Buddha as intrinsic nature’ in Lotus Sutra school, ‘one true realm of reality’ in the Flower Ornament School, and ‘pure bodhi mind’ in the True Word School. The various terms in effect refer to the same entity. The *Discourse on the Perfection of Consciousness-only* states that “Truth is the true form of something, which is apparently not delusive deception; thus, something that has an outward appearance that is immutable, it denotes ‘as usual’. It is said that the truth is in all dharmas, which is as perpetual as its self-nature, and is therefore called thusness”. The *Vimalakirti Sutra* says, “The so-called thusness is neither plural nor diverse”. The *Diamond Sutra* also states, “He who is called ‘the Realized One’ (*tathāgata*), has not come from anywhere, nor has he gone anywhere”. However, this mind-nature refers to true mind and intrinsic nature, but not any other kind of mind in other thoughts. The quotidian sense of mind is a deluded mind, nescience. The mind we desire to illuminate now is the ultimate true mind, which is the true reality of existence”.

The above text is particularly noticeable in proclaiming that “the various titles in effect refer to the same entity”. We have realized that the same idea is manifested in various terms, including ‘intrinsic nature’, ‘thusness’, ‘Buddha-nature’, ‘the nature of emptiness’, ‘mark of emptiness in all dharmas’, ‘true mind’, ‘pure mind’, ‘womb of the Tathāgata’, and ‘the essential characteristic of thusness’. The more we read these terms, the better we understand ‘thusness’ and ‘intrinsic nature’.

When we translate Buddhist scriptures and epithets into foreign languages, we easily lose some subtle and profound elements. This dilemma in effect reflects the difference between Eastern and Western Buddhist cultures, which is the reason why Eastern and Western scholars have often found it hard to communicate with each other on approaches to studying Buddhism.

The many different nomenclatures of the important concept of ‘intrinsic nature’ are further explained here. (The explanations are excerpted from *The Common Buddhist Glossary*, 佛學常見詞彙):

**Intrinsic Nature (自性):** 1) one’s original nature; the unchanging, immutable essence in all dharmas; 2) the Buddha-nature vested in all sentient beings (p. 287).

**True Mind (真心):** the mind that is real and beyond all obstacles; a synonym for Buddha-nature (p. 416).



**Thusness (zhen ru 真如):** ‘zhen’ denotes ‘the real’, and ‘ru’ means ‘thus always or eternally so’. This term implies something both real and unchanging as usual. As the precious likeness of all dharmas and the universal essence, thusness never changes. It is neither created nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, and neither increases nor diminishes. This is the so-called Unconditioned Phenomena. This innately pure mind of all sentient beings is also called Buddha-nature, Dharma-body, the precious likeness of Buddha, Dharma-realm, Dharma nature, and perfectly accomplished nature of reality. The Awakening of Faith (大乘起信論) states that “All the dharmas since the very beginning transcend characteristics of discourse, transcend the characteristics of naming, and transcend the characteristics of cognitive objects. They are absolutely undifferentiated, changeless, and indestructible. There is nothing but this One Mind and for this reason it is nominally called Thusness (p. 417)”.

**True Form of Thusness (zhen ru shi xiang 真如實相):** ‘true (zhen)’ means not false, ‘as usual (ru)’ denotes immutability, and ‘real (shi)’ is a quality that is distinguished from emptiness. ‘Zhen ru’ (真如) refers to the innately pure mind of all sentient beings, which is also called Dharma-body, womb of the Tathāgata, Dharma nature and Buddha-nature. It is real but not false, and is thus titled ‘True Form of Thusness’ (p. 417).

## **2. The Inevitable Relationship between Cause and Consequence**

Another core notion in Buddhism is ‘the relationship between cause and consequence’. This means that regardless of the scale or nature of our actions, they will generate inescapable consequences. Good will be rewarded with good, and evil with evil.

Because of the notion of cause and consequence, Buddhists believe that there exists a system of successively cyclic existence of myriad things, sustaining the rebirth of humans and all the life forms after death.

Based on this notion, some critics remark that “Buddhists merely expect to be rewarded”; that is to say, doing good deed now is done in exchange for something good received in the future. With their mistaken view of the Buddhist notion of cause and consequence, they turn the original practice of good deeds into a mercantile transaction.

Seemingly reasonable at first glance, this accusation fails to recognize that Buddhist teachings aim at reinstating one’s ‘intrinsic nature’ and ‘pure mind’ by steering one’s thoughts and conduct, the cultivation of one’s pure mind, and the attainment of enlightenment. The perfection of pure mind, as far as moral standing is concerned, is the goal of Buddhism. Certainly, pursuing perfection is also the aim of Christianity.

If we comprehend intrinsic nature, its hindrance and restoration, we will naturally understand the inevitability of the law of cause

and effect; with this comprehension, we master the core of Buddhist teaching. If we continue cultivating ourselves, we will eventually become enlightened, the highest realm of human life. Enlightened beings transcend the ordinary and attain sainthood, whereas the un-enlightened beings remain at the mundane level of cognition and practice.

In the following chapter, we will compare the logical similarities and differences between Buddhism and Christianity.

### **A Summary of the Basic Understanding of Buddhism**

Buddhism is a philosophy of human life and afterlife taught by the Buddha. An enlightened sage himself, the Buddha taught people the idea of enlightening one's mind and seeing one's (Buddha-) nature, and he provided numerous approaches to attaining enlightenment. It is the truth to all dharmas in the world, transforming delusion into awakening, escaping suffering and attaining happiness. If we want to be a follower of the Buddha, our ultimate aim is to learn how to attain enlightenment.

In order to attain enlightenment, we ought to grasp two principles: the first is that there is an inevitable causal relationship; the other is that everyone can restore their intrinsic nature and become a Buddha through individual effort.

Buddhism espouses cyclic existence that abides by the law of cause and effect. According to this law, one will be reborn in one of the six realms of existence after one's bodily life has ended in this life. If one could attain enlightenment and become a buddha, one would be able to escape from the suffering of the recurring cycle of rebirth and attain nirvana. In order to become a buddha, we have to observe certain disciplines; these keep us from the three poisons of craving, aversion, and ignorance, and help us cultivate the mind-condition of non-self.

The Buddhist cycle of rebirth is strikingly similar to the Christian God's last judgment that determines one's final ascent to Heaven or descent to Hell. Through recording the Buddha's life-long teachings, the canons of Buddhism teach how to righteously carry out one's lives. The chapters below will expound some of the important Buddhist notions and theories, promoting a better understanding of Buddhism.

## Chapter 3

### A Comparison between Buddhism and Other Religions

The fundamental difference between Buddhism and Christianity is that the latter believes in God, who is immutable, beginningless and endless. God created the Universe and everything within it. In contrast, there is no 'God' in Buddhism; the myriad things of the Universe evolve from purely and perfectly wholesome 'intrinsic nature', which is also called *Thusness*, *Self-nature* or *Reality-nature*. It is eternal without beginning or end.

When discussing the sacred power to create an immaculate system that dictates the evolution of myriad things, Chapter 1 already touched upon the central difference between Buddhism and Christianity. This chapter will expound further on this point.

For the convenience of the current discussion, 'Christianity' is used as a general reference to all Western religions, which is collectively called monotheism. All of the observations made around Christianity are also applicable to Judaism, and Islam.

The goal of human life is to pursue perfection. Christianity seeks this perfection through God. Although Buddhism does not promote belief in God, Buddhist followers believe in an underlying unchanging condition and that seeking ultimate truth eventually leads to liberation from life and death.

Buddhist followers deem that everyone possesses an 'intrinsic nature' that is restorable and ideal, because this nature is pure and clean. The Buddha teaches us to revive our intrinsic nature. In sum, Christians and Buddhists differ in their articulation and attainment of perfection.

### **The Creative Process of the Myriad Things**

According to Christian doctrines, God created Heaven, Earth and everything in the world. If we accept this theory, we must see the process of creation in sequential steps:

1. a system that dictates the operation of myriad things
2. planets in the Universe
3. biological creatures on Earth
4. human beings

The Creator must have designed a "system" prior to the creation of myriad things, because the phenomena that planets travel around the sun attests to the existence of certain laws, including the Law of Motion and the Law of Gravity. These laws were in effect before God created the planets, which would have lost their orbits around the sun otherwise. Because of the existence of these laws and many other natural laws, such as the famous Mass-energy equivalence ( $E=mc^2$ ), we have sufficient reasons to argue that step 1 is prior to step 2.

Christian doctrine also claims that humans and other creatures were created by God. Since these creatures live on Earth, the latter must have been created before the former. Hence, it is said that step 2 occurred prior to steps 3 and 4.

Scientists have discovered other biological creatures were already living on earth 350 million years before humans first appeared, so we can see that step 3 is prior to step 4.

As the aforementioned reasons demonstrate, every person whether a Christian, a Buddhist, or an atheist, can accept the above order of creation.

In Christianity, God governs the operation of the Universe.

But from the perspective of Buddhism, 'intrinsic nature' has been responsible for the evolution of the entire system. As the Buddhist saying goes, "intrinsic nature is capable of creating myriad things". Through the 'chain of causation' (Skt: *nidāna*), the system enables the myriad things to run. As a result, all the things automatically evolve and receive responses according to circumstances. Humans and other creatures on Earth are not emotionally attached or subservient to God.

When exploring the reception of Buddhist laws, we ought to adopt a modern perspective. We are discussing a philosophy that is concerned with life, death, and all the encounters we experience. Such a serious project must be tested in relation to its logical reception, as modern citizens have a complete right and responsibility to exercise their judgment and reject what is not reasonable.

The Buddha once said, "Don't believe a teaching just because you've heard it from a man who's supposed to be holy, or because it's contained in a book supposed to be holy, or because all your friends and neighbours believe it. But

whatever you've observed and analyzed for yourself and found to be reasonable and good, then accept that and put it into practice".<sup>1</sup>

Buddhist discourses must be able to afford the critiques and tests from science. So are other religions. Those who are hoping to seek the truth would ask: "Realistically, when were the universe and the first lives created, regardless of whether they were created by God or by the evolution of intrinsic nature?"

Since Charles Darwin formulated the theory of evolution, there have been endless debates between scientists and theologians about who created the world. Christians believe that the myriad things in the universe were deliberately designed, whereas scientists regard that "it is not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change". These two sides are not compatible at all.

Buddhism gets the best of both worlds and offers a perfect solution. On the one hand, the evolution of 'intrinsic nature' that possesses all and generates everything leads to the creation of the myriad things; it resonates with the idea that the Universe is perfectly fine-tuned by God. On the other hand, the chain of causation (*nidāna*) in Buddhism is compatible with the scientific theory of evolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Gach, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Buddhism* (2nd edition) (New York: Alpha Books, 2004), 54.



## Morality and Rebirth

Despite the fact that Christianity and Buddhism markedly differ in their respective theories of the creation of the Universe, both consider that there should be necessary means to guide human behaviors.

In Christianity, God is the judge of us all.

In Buddhism, there is no such figure to take on this judgmental responsibility. Justice exists in the system. The irresistible law of 'cause and consequence' ensures that what goes around comes around. Just as the Daoist scripture *Lao Tse's Treatise on the Response of the Tao* reads, "Curses and blessings do not come through gates, but man himself invites their arrival. The reward of good and evil is like the shadow accompanying a body".<sup>2</sup>

The ultimate goal of Buddhist followers is to seek perfection and become a buddha. Even without attaining Buddhahood, Buddhist followers at least expect to permanently escape from life, death, and the three realms (desire realm, form realm and formless realm). Christians receive the teaching that God is almighty; their ultimate goal is to ascend to Heaven, the very dwelling place of God. Both religious practices pursue perfection, but Christianity never makes reference to the law of cause and effect.

In Christianity, at death, every person faces judgment based on his or her deeds in life. God judges whether each person goes to Heaven or Hell or, according to Catholicism, to Purgatory.

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<sup>2</sup> 太上感應篇: "禍福無門, 惟人自招: 善惡之報, 如影隨形."

According to Buddhism, one's deeds determine one's destiny:

1. One is reborn in the Western Paradise and eventually becomes a Buddha, attains nirvana, and restores one's 'intrinsic nature'.<sup>3</sup>
2. One is reborn in one of the six realms - god realm, demi-god realm, human realm, animal realm, hungry ghost realm, hell realm - through cyclical rebirth.

The inevitable relationship between cause and consequence governs where the 'soul' or 'divine consciousness' goes after death. The afterlives portrayed in both religions are strikingly similar. There is, however, a sharp distinction between the hells of the two religions; the soul sent to the Christian Hell will never have the opportunity to leave; in contrast, the individual in the hell of incessant suffering (the last and deepest of the eight hot hells in Buddhism) could still cultivate his or herself and eventually become a Buddha after going through painful punishments and other realms of life.

The world is constantly evolving without a stop. Let us imagine what it might look like in a thousand, a hundred thousand and even a million years. Lives on Earth will unavoidably mutate along with environmental changes. Maybe Earth will no longer be habitable due to dramatic changes in climate and weather. Some species would be replaced by new species.

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<sup>3</sup> In the Western Paradise, the four identities of sagehood are buddha, bodhisattva, solitary realizer, hearers of the word of the Buddha. One is able to escape from the cyclic rebirth through the six realms once one is granted one of the identities.

Human intelligence may not be able to resist the anthropogenic extinction in future. By then, human species would have been extinguished on Earth, where the cyclic system of rebirth would still function as usual.

Eventually, planet Earth might succumb to unimaginable catastrophes, such as atmospheric loss and the extinction of life as we know it. When life forms disappear from Earth, all miserable beings experiencing the hell of incessant suffering would also attain salvation. The *Flower Adornment Sutra* states that “both sentient and insentient beings achieve perfect enlightenment”<sup>4</sup> The great perfection in Buddhism must be the escape from all the sufferings, a notion that is different from Christianity, which believes that all afflicted persons in Hell are doomed and will never reach salvation.

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<sup>4</sup> 華嚴經: “情與無情, 同成正覺.”

## Comparisons between Christianity and Buddhism

	Christianity	Buddhism
<b>The origin of myriad things</b>	<p>God</p> <p>What is God?</p> <p>Christians believe that God is the creator of Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things.</p> <p>He supervises all the lives and things he created in the Universe.</p> <p>He judges humans, and gives rewards and punishments to humans according to their behaviours.</p> <p>People pray to God, while God responds to their prayers and offers them guidance.</p>	<p>Intrinsic Nature (Self-nature)</p> <p>What is 'intrinsic nature'?</p> <p>Buddhism uses different languages to articulate 'intrinsic nature', including mind-nature, thusness, original nature, self-nature, Buddha-nature, nature of emptiness, mark of emptiness of all dharmas, and mind of the tathāgatagarbha. It is almost impossible to precisely define the term of 'intrinsic nature', which can be described as follows:</p> <p>'Intrinsic nature' is perfect. 'Intrinsic nature' is not derived from conditions, but is neither created nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, and it neither increases nor diminishes. It evolves into all phenomena. Our 'intrinsic nature' is blocked by craving, aversion, and ignorance.</p> <p>'Intrinsic nature' has created a system for the Universe, in which everything evolves. It is called the chain of causation in Buddhism.</p> <p>'Intrinsic nature' is formless. It does not judge our behaviours. It does not express love and hatred. It is not the object of worship.</p>

	Christianity	Buddhism
<b>The creation</b>	<p>1. God created a flawless system that incorporates the laws of gravity, motion, and so on.</p> <p>2. God created the Universe and everything within.</p> <p>According to the scientifically corroborated Big Bang Theory, a giant explosion produced stars and galaxies. Christianity, however, is not compatible with the Big Bang, and the Bible makes no reference to the latter.</p>	<p>1. All phenomena are generated from causes and conditions. 'Intrinsic nature' evolves into a system that consists of the laws of gravity and motion as well as the laws of conditioned genesis and causation.</p> <p>2. The myriad things including planets and lives are subject to the law of conditioned genesis.</p> <p>The law of conditioned genesis can be applied also to embrace the Big Bang Theory.</p>

	<b>Christianity</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>
<b>Current life</b> <b>1. Morality</b>	<p>Humans have the discretion to live their own lives. They are free to choose good deeds or bad deeds. They need to be admonished by God.</p>	<p>Every person is initially endowed with a perfect nature, namely, intrinsic nature. This nature becomes hindered and concealed by each person's craving, aversion, and ignorance during his or her cyclic existence. Every person needs to find the correct path in order to restore that intrinsic nature, which is perfect and identical to the nature of Buddha.</p>
<b>2. View on current conditions</b>	<p>Misfortunes and fortunes have all been pre-arranged by God and cannot be explained by human intelligence. When plagued by misfortune, the only option is to pray for salvific action.</p>	<p>An effect in the present must be related to a cause in the past. As a result, a Buddhist does not covet or loathe, and deems that all worldly affairs are fair.</p>

	<b>Christianity</b>	<b>Buddhism</b>
<b>Afterlife</b>	Upon death, every person faces a trial before God. After judging the record of a person's conduct during his or her lifetime, each person is rewarded with a place in Heaven or punished to descend to Hell for eternity.	<p>There exists an inevitable chain of causation. One is rewarded or punished not only at the end of life but at all times.</p> <p>In accordance with one's deeds. These deeds include good and evil deeds not only the present but also over the course of past lives. The running of causes and effects is spontaneous without any trial. Based on one's behavior, one may be reborn in a Pure Land or in one of several underworld hells, or one may be reborn again as human or as some other form of life. Although persons who are destined for hell suffer all kinds of pains, these persons still have the chance to join the cyclic rebirth and finally obtain liberation.</p>
<b>Belief</b>	Belief is of fundamental importance for Christianity and for all monotheistic religions. Believers must ritually express their confirmation of the existence and authority of God. They believe that everyone in the world has the opportunity to ascend to Heaven or descend to Earth.	Buddhists followers also hold beliefs. They believe in the inevitable relationship between cause and consequence that are related to acts of good and evil. They also believe that every person can become a Buddha.

## **From “Conditioned Phenomena” to “Unconditioned Phenomena”: How Buddhist thinking differs from other types of religious thinking**

I found that there is one perspective in Buddhist sutras that is capable of explaining the logical thinking of all the mainstream religions in the world.

Everything seen through Buddhism bifurcates into “conditioned phenomena” and “unconditioned phenomena”.

According to Buddhism, people should certainly remember that nothing that arises, ceases, and transforms would last forever. These things and affairs are called “conditioned phenomena” in Buddhism. There is a beginning and an end to human life; therefore, human life belongs to “conditioned phenomena”.

Section 32 of the *Diamond Sutra* reads: “All conditioned phenomena are just illusions - like bubbles, like shadows, like dew, and lightning. This is the way one should see the conditioned”<sup>5</sup>. It teaches that we ought to treat conditioned phenomena including human life in this manner, and hence not cling to fame and wealth.

Aside from “conditioned phenomena”, there exists “unconditioned phenomena” in myriad things.

Unconditioned phenomena, without birth and death, refer to the permanent aspects of eternity. Is it possible to enumerate examples in order to describe the realm of “unconditioned

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<sup>5</sup> 金剛經第 32 分: “一切有為法, 如夢幻泡影. 如露亦如電, 應作如是觀.”



phenomena?” The answer is yes. If the Christian God does exist, and never changes, then he belongs to “unconditioned phenomena”. So is Heaven and Hell. The Trinity in Protestantism can also be described as “unconditioned phenomena”.

The saying in Section 7 of the *Diamond Sutra* that “all sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity” attests to the differences regarding the understanding of unconditioned phenomena among men of insight. Consequently, it illustrates that sages and highly respected scholars of various religions differ in their view of eternal things, such as the True God.

Here I would like to particularly emphasize that the theory of “conditioned phenomena” and “unconditioned phenomena” is my personal opinion derived and developed from reading the *Diamond Sutra*. For instance, “all sages and highly respected scholars” does not mean the hierarchy of worldlings, scholars, and sages among disciples of the Buddha. In my mind, it refers to every cultivated and intelligent practitioner. Pardon me, if readers disagree. In addition, I describe unconditioned phenomena as the opposite of conditioned phenomena. Conditioned phenomena are a sphere of cognition. So are unconditioned phenomena.

Everyone understands and agrees that human life belongs to “conditioned phenomena”. I contend that all the creations and actions are part of “conditioned phenomena”. I also consider that human intelligence cannot figure out what “unconditioned

phenomena” says after all. Not only does Buddha not expound, but he points out that there is nothing to say.

So how should we deal with personal conduct? According to Christianity, its disciples attain the supreme achievement by following the instruction of God. “Everyone who believes may have eternal life in him”, says the *Bible*.<sup>6</sup> Nothing is more important than adhering to the instruction of the Lord. Believers have Jesus in their heart; his presence neither arises nor ceases; in other words, Jesus is eternal and therefore unconditioned phenomena. According to Buddhist theory, there is no dharma to be explained in unconditioned phenomena (see Section 21 of the *Diamond Sutra*). After attaining enlightenment, Buddha preached sutras and scriptures for forty-nine years, and yet he still had nothing to say about unconditioned phenomena. It is very wise to describe the eternal condition as “nothing to explain”, since there is indeed no evidence to attest whether eternal things and conditions exist or not.

What should Chinese people properly address, if someone in China proposes to its compatriots that they ought to believe in some religion? Below are three suggested steps:

- 1) Comprehend what “religion” is.
- 2) Check what religions have been sanctioned by the State Administration for Religious Affairs.
- 3) Acquire some basic knowledge about the sanctioned religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islamism) and consider which religion to believe.

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<sup>6</sup> “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven.”

In reality, no one is able to prove or negate the existence of a creator. Even if there is one, is the creator the Christian Trinity or the One or the Unique Allah believed in Islam? Under the circumstances, the Chinese feel unable to wholeheartedly accept the theory of the existence of a creator; a logical response is to neither accept nor reject but to govern one's conducts with a pure mind.

Regarding the so-called eternal creator, scientists are not able to comment. This is because scientists do not study unconditioned phenomena and have no ideas about the either the arising condition or ceasing condition, namely, unconditioned phenomena.

The highest accomplishment in Buddhism is the “supreme correct enlightenment”<sup>7</sup>, or *anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi* in Sanskrit. The advanced level of Buddhist cultivation articulates that “there is no Dharma whatsoever that the Realized One has fully awakened to”<sup>8</sup>, (Section 7 of the *Diamond Sutra*), or “there is no Dharma on the supreme correct enlightenment attained by Buddha”<sup>9</sup> (Section 17 of the *Diamond Sutra*). This scriptural text is exceptionally enlightening. While Christian conduct is dictated in the Old Testament and New Testament, Buddhist learning does not have any set doctrine to follow for attaining the supreme achievement. Section 21 of the *Diamond Sutra* even says: “Anybody who would say such things as ‘the Tathāgata has taught the Dharma’ would misrepresent me, on

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<sup>7</sup> 無上正等正覺.

<sup>8</sup> 金剛經第 7 分: “無有定法, 名阿耨多羅三藐三菩提.”

<sup>9</sup> 金剛經第 17 分: “實無有法, 佛得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提.”

account of wrong learning”<sup>10</sup>. Here, “on account of wrong learning” means that people do not understand that Buddha never teaches anything concerning permanent and immutable realms, i.e., unconditioned phenomena.

In other words, Buddhism never sets any particular standard to ask its followers to follow blindly, which in this context indicates “fanatical faith”. The peril of “fanatical faith” is self-evident. If some devout religious believer takes the killing of pagans from another religious or ethnic group to be god’s will, he or she could even risk everything to bring about unbearable calamity. People today are entrapped in just such an abysmal world.

Following the above text, if no set doctrine could obtain supremely correct enlightenment, then how can it be realized? We ought to know that because humans have a conscience, we make decisions following our conscience. For example, we ought to be “free from all distinctive characteristics, and offer all good deeds”. But this is simply wishful thinking, as our craving, aversion, and ignorance might cloud our conscience. If we had the capacity to attain enlightenment, illuminate our minds, and see our own intrinsic nature, there would be no danger of anything going wrong.

Even though it does not dictate a particular list of commandments to follow, Buddhist teaching prompts humans to understand ways of thinking in order to find the correct direction. Thus, several observations can be made in here:

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<sup>10</sup> 金剛經第 21 分更: “若人言如來有所說法, 即為謗佛, 不能解我所說故.”

- 1) The distinction between conditioned phenomena and unconditioned phenomena exists in the myriad things of the universe.
- 2) Human intelligence of 'conditioned phenomena' is measurable, and knowledge generated from that intelligence is consistent.
- 3) Human understanding of 'unconditioned phenomena' is not measurable.
- 4) Buddha has no Dharma to teach about 'unconditioned phenomena'; this is attested in Buddhist sutras.

Humans are not capable of discerning the realm of "unconditioned phenomena". Since ancient times, none of the creators discussed in any religion can be attested or negated. Through observing the online debates between religious scenes, including Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims, I get the impression that religious people are constantly hoping to prove the existence of a creator.

My concluding remark is that every religion is actively seeking proof of the Truth; this aim is shared among different religions. No matter what religion one belongs to, he and other religious believers are comrades on the road of searching for the Truth. In that way, people shall not treat believers of other religions with a discriminating mind, the elimination of which will be the first step to attaining a harmonious world.

## Part II

### Understanding Buddhism as a Religion

We cannot discuss the relationship between religion and the modern society without referring to different religions. Readers may be more familiar with Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam than they are with Buddhism.

As a result, the first three chapters are arranged to clearly expound and reveal the cores and outlines of Buddhist theories. We also need to recognize other details in Buddhist theories that are equally profound and enlightening. Some of the principles are relatively harder than others to apprehend, and thus require further contemplation.

In the following chapters, I will investigate some intriguing issues that pertain to Buddhism, through which I expect to stimulate modern people to study religion and social relations.

## Chapter 4

### How does Buddhism Explain Our Lives?

How do people explain phenomena occurring in their lives? For example, why are some people wealthy, but others poor? Why have civilizations waxed and waned everywhere in the world? In other words, is everything doomed to change?

From the Buddhist perspective, one has to consider two factors when examining the evolution of things: 1. The unavoidable connections of cause and effect; 2. The theory of causal condition (Skt. *pratyaya*) upon which everything occurs.

#### **‘Causes’ and ‘Effects’**

Chapter 2 has mentioned that the inevitable law of cause and effect is a key concept in Buddhism. Activities in one’s previous life or in this life lead to blessings and sufferings in the present life. Sometimes this condition is called fate or destiny.

#### **‘Causes’ and ‘Conditions’ of Things**

Besides the aforementioned law of cause and effect, Buddhists believe that there has to be a main cause to make a thing happen. While the main cause directly incurs a result, there needs to be an indirect cause to help in producing the result.

Another point I shall mention is: the first factor, namely, causes and effects, relates to ethics and virtues; the second factor, however, does not necessarily relate to ethics and virtues. The law of dependent arising that is relevant to the second factor will be elucidated in Chapter 10.

### **How to introduce “law of cause and effect” and “theory of dependent arising<sup>1</sup>” into everyday affairs?**

People are always eager to know what will happen in the future, regardless of prearrangements in life or the (un)fairness of fate. If we are not able to change our fate, then our efforts in life would appear meaningless. Some might ask, when Buddhism teaches that “all phenomena are delusion and deception”, isn’t this pessimistic? If we knew that we are destined to be poor, wouldn’t that knowledge decrease our passion for hard work?

Actually, Buddhist theories are not pessimistic at all. According to the law of cause and effect in Buddhism, we have plenty of chances to change our fate as long as we positively offer up good deeds.

Generally, for one “cause” to produce a certain result, some additional factors are required to determine the result absolutely. Thus, even if you were doomed to live a tough life, no one would be able to precisely predict the level of difficulty or the details of your misfortune. If you understand how to bring about good karma, you will be able to delay the result or

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<sup>1</sup> 緣起論.



even to avoid undesirable fate altogether.

A historical anecdote in China describes a change of fate in the case of an official Yuan Liaofan, who lived in the Wangli era of the Ming dynasty (1533-1606). Yuan's story strongly attests to the aforementioned principle. As the story goes, when Mr. Yuan was young, a fortune teller predicted that he would only live to the age of fifty-three and would have an ordinary life with no career establishment. Many of aspects of what was forecast came true. At the time, imperial examinations were the only approach to climb up the social ladder. Later, Yuan Liaofan became acquainted with Chan Master Yungu, who pointed out to him that "Each person creates their own fate; one's advantageous rewards are sought by oneself". Following this principle, Yuan Liaofan began to repent of the negative actions he had done in the past, and made the resolution to commit three thousand deeds. After a while, Mr. Yuan gradually changed his fate of "short life", "no offspring" and "no achievement in officialdom". His story has been widely circulated, passed down from generation to generation, and dramatized for television.

### **Is the system of cause and effect fair?**

First let us discuss the fairness of having a prearranged fate with respect to a person who is completely unaware of his activities in the past life. The answer is rather simple. If you believe that your present life is part of the experience of a "life entity", whether or not you know about your past will not be so important.

Buddhism considers that the existence of human beings is the result of cyclic existence. Consequently, you ought to shoulder your responsibility for what you have done in the past. This statement is both correct and appropriate.

When we learn that different people's destinies are so polarized: while some are living a blissfully carefree life with distinguished talent and outstanding beauty, and enjoying glory and wealth; at the same time, others are suffering from poverty, intellectual impairment, and hardship. These great differentiations urge us to ask: is the world a fair place?

The Buddhist theory of cause and consequence provides an apt analysis on the topic: this theory is not only about fairness but also helping people to clearly understand the fairness of the world.

### **Why are some of us so wealthy?**

Why are some people extremely affluent but others so destitute? In fact, we are rich not because of our intelligence. We could probably earn some fortune if we are smart enough, but this does not guarantee that we could maintain our wealth for even a short period of time. Our lifelong wealth and glory are derived from the good deeds and merits we have accomplished in the past. Otherwise, even if a person has the means to earn money, some of that person's family members might squander the fortune.

Some of us may have been born with the genes that incline us to have entrepreneurial talent or the acumen for acquiring wealth and fame. With such abilities, we may be able to amass an enormous fortune; however, we may also be excessively greedy and become slaves to money. In the end, we may fall into the abyss of greed.

All things are interconnected; results derived from the past can act as causes in the present. Even when someone was born with entrepreneurial talent and an optimistic and hardworking spirit, this results from that person's previous deeds. Causes and effects are linked to one another infinitely.

Simply put, some of us are affluent and honourable because of our good deeds in the past and in our present lives. It could be that we helped others with our personal wealth, and therefore we have received rewards for our compassion. On the contrary, if we are impoverished, it is perhaps due to evil deeds we have done in our past lives. We should not blame anyone else for our own suffering, but it does not mean that we have to live a pessimistic life.

**An excerpt from a Buddhist text:**

The Buddha taught us that wealth, wisdom, and long life are all karmic results. If we want to obtain the result, we must first nurture and establish the cause. Good causes result in good results, while bad causes result in bad results or retribution. Where there is a cause, there will be a result and where there is a result, there was a cause. The Buddha taught us that having wealth is the karmic result of a cause planted

in former lifetimes. What was this cause? The giving of wealth results in obtaining wealth, the giving of teaching results in obtaining wisdom, the giving of fearlessness results in obtaining health and long life. Therefore, if we wish to have wealth, wisdom, and long and healthy lives in our future, we need to nurture and establish these causes in this lifetime. If we practice the paramita of giving diligently, we will enjoy the benefits and good results in our present lifetime, without needing to wait for the next life. Effect is only created through planting the seed of the cause. This is the law of cause and effect. And this law never changes.

The law of cause and effect is applicable not only to individual cases, but also to national and international affairs. We may use the history of modern China to illustrate this point.

In many respects, incidents that occurred during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) led to situations that are unacceptable by any standard. These tragic incidents caused a fundamental change of attitude among members of the ruling Chinese Communist Party. This was realized in its party congress in December 1978 (The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee).

This congress carried out the guideline of “seeking truth from facts”, which was expressed as “practice is the sole criterion of truth”. The guideline implemented a corresponding policy: no philosophy can provide an eternal and ideal model for good governance. Wrong political lines have to be put right. If our experience from practices tells us that the market economy is beneficial to the country, it shall replace a planned economy.

Although state-owned enterprise is characteristic of a Communist society, this new guideline has brought about policies that allow the running of private companies.

All the preposterous incidents that occurred during the Cultural Revolution are the causes that led to the result, the Reform and Opening Up Policy. This reform, which itself is also a cause, has led to the result of economic prosperity. Looking ahead, we foresee new problems deriving from this type of prosperity. The future of China is dependent upon all kinds of decisions constantly made by the party leaders in response to large and small issues. To summarize, a country's fate is similar to a person's fate; thinking determines destiny.

## **Conclusion**

Buddhism has a clear concept, which is the fairness of life. If we do not consider that we are the masters of our fate, perhaps we will believe that life has not been treating us fairly. Having a particular mindset often triggers serious consequences; that is, if individuals perceive the world as an unfair place, they tend to prompt retaliations towards others, which will unavoidably lead to calamity. The saddest truth is that such misfortunes are taking place everywhere in the world. Catastrophic massacres are derived from jealousy, discontent, confrontation, and conflict; all of these can be rightly treated by the recipe of Buddhism.

## Chapter 5

### What are the Benefits of Learning Buddhism?

Buddhism is beneficial from two major aspects: 1) it rewards every Buddhist learner on the personal level, and 2) it advocates peace on earth, which further benefits the entire human society. I will discuss the benefits of Buddhism under these two separate sections.

#### 1. The benefit of Buddhism to individuals

Buddhism benefits us on the personal level. First, its theories enlighten us and help us understand ourselves and our surroundings, including the myriad things in the universe. However, mere understanding is not enough; we have to practice in accordance with Buddhist teachings. If we succeed, we would have attained enlightenment in terms of Buddhism. That is, we realize that enlightenment means that we have escaped suffering and that is how we attain true happiness.

Second, although there might still be some distance to enlightenment, if we cherish people and things surrounding us, and assiduously cultivate ourselves, we will feel enriched. Buddhism gives us hope, and helps us to carefully avoid wrong doings. Cultivation is a special term in Buddhism; it demonstrates the things a Buddhist follower shall do, and outlines the compassionate life a Buddhist follower shall live to eliminate craving, aversion, and ignorance.

Third, it is reasonable for us to pray for help from the buddhas and bodhisattvas. When we pray to them, our prayers will be answered.

All in all, there are at least three main reasons that illustrate the benefits Buddhism brings to individuals.

### **Reason One: Buddhism enlightens us**

Buddhism teaches us that our intrinsic nature can generate all phenomena. All things are created by the mind alone; all things are created by the accumulation of causal conditions and annihilated by the scattering of causal conditions. All sentient beings, even including plants and trees, possess “intrinsic nature”, which is equivalent to Buddha nature. This is the basis for arguing for the equality of all sentient beings. After we have eliminated craving, aversion and ignorance, and have severed nescience, we will be able to restore our “intrinsic nature”.

“Intrinsic nature” is perfect. Humans, all sentient beings and myriad things in the universe belong to a united entity. Since Buddhism acknowledges that all phenomena are created by causes and conditions, it does not negate Evolutionism. If we truly understand that the living existence of myriad things is only delusional, and understand the principle of cause and consequence, we are already on the road to enlightenment. Everything has its cause. We cannot grasp truth, because we have been deceived and our perception has been clouded by external phenomena. As long as we acknowledge that “all dharmas are utterly nonexistent, absolutely empty, and unobtainable”, we need not worry about the future;

thereupon, we will be confident to create a better future. This is the first benefit of learning Buddhism. Let us all set out to learn Buddhism, become Buddha, attain an extraordinary reward and restore our infinite wisdom.

### **Reason Two: Cultivation enriches us**

Even though you might still be a long way from enlightenment, cultivation brings you the second kind of benefit that is full of enrichment and pleasure. The difference between the two benefits can be described as follows: the first one provides us the most extraordinary reward and naturally brings us pleasure; the second enriches and delights us as long as we know how to offer up good deeds, even though we have not attained enlightenment. This is the second benefit.

We observe from simple factual details in life that cultivation helps us perceive comfort and enrichment. We could use a housewife's story to exemplify the second benefit: There once was an ordinary housewife living near the poverty line who was used to getting up very early in the morning, preparing breakfast for her husband, mother-in-law and child. After dropping off her child at school, she needed to continue with chores at home. In order to help her husband support the family, she took up a part-time job as a cashier at a grocery market. She worked for many years according to such a schedule and was quite content; then, one day, she met one of her former classmates who had married a wealthy man. This classmate asked her a question that changed her view of her life: "Why are you treated as a servant in your family?" She became bewildered, and this bred discontent. As her affliction grew, her relationship with husband and



mother-in-law grew increasingly tense.

By chance, she met another classmate, who was a Buddhist follower and who advised her to study Buddhism. She began to read books about Buddhism. After a while, she began to reflect upon her situation and gradually her perspective changed completely. She gradually understood the necessity of “giving away”<sup>1</sup>. The term means “practices or intentions to help others without expecting any form of return”. She understood that monetary donation is one form of giving away, while serving others, including her own family members, is another form of giving away (inner-wealth giving). In the end, the life of this housewife did not change materially, but her comprehension of this straightforward Buddhist concept brought her fulfillment and peace of mind. This is an example of the alleviation of agony through learning Buddhism.

If you have been deceived or defamed by someone, you might want to retaliate, strike back, or demand compensation via legal or other approaches. However, Buddhism teaches us to take a completely different stance. You realize that you must have done something in a previous life that has caused such debts and anger between you and the person who is targeting you, although you are probably not aware of in this life. Your victimizer tries every possible way to take vengeance on you. If you strike back, you will only increase the debt and anger. If you can bear and let go, you will be rewarded. From a Buddhist point of view, this matter offers you an opportunity

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<sup>1</sup> 布施.

to cultivate and arouse an enlightened mind. This is another case to demonstrate how Buddhism can help you. There is an old Chinese adage that is particularly instructive: “Avarice leads to perdition beyond redemption, tolerance makes space boundless”. In other words, when experiencing an intense situation, if we are able to tolerate or give up some of our sense of entitlement, we will very likely find ourselves in a more advantageous position.

Buddhism may help us feel better in the face of adversity. When we feel frustrated or pained as a result of all kinds of misfortunes, such as health problems, loss of loved ones, the pressures of work, failure in exams, and other seemingly insurmountable problems, Buddhism is always capable of providing us a fulfilled and satisfied explanation. This is true liberation. Buddhism helps people to eliminate their physical and spiritual sufferings; albeit these are a benefit of liberation, and are not as important as the aforementioned enlightenment and nirvana.<sup>2</sup>

### **Reason Three: Buddhas and Bodhisattvas always “respond to prayers”**

Are prayers always answered? All religions say the same. What if a devoted believer prays for god’s healing power, and his recurring illness is cured? Does this mean that this patient was blessed by god? If he really receives god’s blessing, then it involves mysterious manifestation and thereupon Unconditioned Phenomena; this is something that cannot be testified by human intelligence.

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 17.

When our prayers are answered, for example, not only has something we wish to see happened, but also, in an inexplicable manner, it is something we call a miracle. When we encounter a miracle, another question immediately emerges: do we believe in miracles? I propose three ways to explain what we see:

1. We recognize the existence of miracles.
2. We may refuse to acknowledge the existence of miracles, but we cannot deny their occurrence. Since something inexplicable has happened, we have to describe it as something beyond the apprehension of human intelligence.
3. We may consider it mere coincidence.

Below is a true story to help readers comprehend why I believe in the infinity of human intelligence, and why we as humans are capable of restoring our intrinsic nature and immeasurable intelligence through effort.

E and J are cousin sisters living together in an apartment in Vancouver. Mr. D, their cousin brother, was a student studying at an MD program on the Canadian east coast. All three are my relatives. One afternoon, J had a dream when she was taking a nap at their Vancouver apartment. After J woke up, she told E that she had had a dream in which their cousin brother D died; in the dream, J saw D's cremation urn inside a small bedroom of a ship. She wanted to enter the room, but was stopped by a guard. Nothing happened until two days later, when D was found dead in his dormitory, and the cause of death was a certain rare brain disease. His time of death

coincided with J's dream, although the misfortune did not come to light until two days later when the university authorities realized that D had not been to school and begun to investigate.

Whether or not this incident is a miracle cannot be determined; it is an inexplicable matter. Everyone would agree that the explanations behind this incident are beyond human intelligence.

The story is sufficient to demonstrate J's capacity to know inexplicable things, although she was not certain whether this kind of revelation would occur again in her lifetime.

It is logical to assume that something would recur had it happened once before. In the future, human intelligence may be able to develop some potential capacity to know things happening three thousand miles away. Perhaps this capability will be within a hand's reach. This also shows that if we understand how to unlock our potential, our intelligence will be immeasurable. Buddhism believes that if we can distance ourselves from craving, aversion, and ignorance, and successfully restore our "intrinsic nature" to achieve the Buddhahood, we will possess uncountable intelligence.

As a Buddhist learner, I believe that buddhas and bodhisattvas will help us find the ideal solution if we pray for them.

## **2. Buddhism's contribution to pushing forward world peace**

Buddhism can contribute to world peace in at least three aspects.

### **(1) Buddhism stresses the removal of craving, aversion, and ignorance**

It is known that craving, aversion, and ignorance are called the three basic poisons, which are the roots of worldly afflictions. Buddhism teaches us to abandon the three poisons. Throughout his entire life, the Buddha taught people on how to remove the habit of asking for rights, and to cultivate compassion towards other people.

Political systems in the world are all concerned with rights. Partisan elections deal with rights. While religion cares for love and compassion, the distribution of rights brings out conflicts, which escalate to hatred, which leads to violence. This book has no intention to judge the advantages and disadvantages of political systems, and will not get involved in analyzing the reasons behind such conflicts. What I would like to point out is: for the sake of our personal benefits and to strike a balance, political science must consider religious love and compassion; without love and compassion we will always face miseries that are occurring everywhere in the world.

**(2) Buddhism teaches us the principles of “a combined form” (Skt. *piṇḍa-grāha*) and “great compassion based on sameness in essence”**

The fundamental sameness among sentient beings of a combined form provides us a reason to treat others and the environment with decency. These two principles are closely related. When our perceived enemies are hurt, we shall not become complacent, for our enemies and ourselves are fundamentally one combined entity.

**(3) Buddhism teaches us the equality of all sentient beings; everyone can master their own destiny**

After years of learning and thinking of “conditioned phenomena” and “unconditioned phenomena”, I came to a luminous conclusion: Buddhism as a religion can prompt peace in the world. I feel the urge to promulgate this view to the world, with a hope that religious people especially those from dominant groups such as Protestants, Catholics and Muslims might have a chance to consult and critique what I suggest. This view has already been articulated at the end of Chapter 3 and will be repeatedly emphasized in the following:

Everything that begins ends. We know from Buddhist theory that things and matters can be divided into “conditioned phenomena” and “unconditioned phenomena”. In Buddhist teaching, conditioned phenomena refer to that which arises, changes and ceases, ranging from animals, plants, other living beings, minerals, and the myriad things of the

universe. Just as Section 32 of the *Diamond Sutra* states: “All conditioned phenomena are simply illusions—like bubbles, like shadows, like dew, and lightning. This is the way one should see the conditioned”.

Besides “conditioned phenomena” there is “unconditioned phenomena”. “Unconditioned phenomena” designate something permanent and immutable, which is described as “abiding by rule as it is” in Buddhism. The *Heart Sutra* states that the characteristic of all teachings is emptiness”, which is neither “arising nor ceasing, neither defiled nor pure, neither adding nor subtracting”. Section 7 of the *Diamond Sutra* points out: “all sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity.”

Let us spend some time to see how “unconditioned phenomena” can be applied to analyse the major religions on earth. Each and every religion (Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam) revere one allegedly existing creator, the conception of whom entirely tallies with the Buddhist view of the so-called “neither rising nor ceasing”. Protestants firmly believe in the permanent being of the Creator, Heaven, and Hell; for them, the only unchanging subject is God. Other religions have their own God too, and each and every god exists forever.

Every religion we see reveres one “God”. This is undeniable, whether or not the existence of “God” has ever been testified scientifically. If the Christian God were true, then the Islamic God would be false; and vice versa. Supposedly,

those who believe in and worship a false god have to go to hell. In order for everyone in the world to get along with each other peacefully, can followers of each religion candidly speak out about their own stance with facts? To do so, we have to acknowledge that we are still in search of the everlasting truth. If feasible, we will utterly understand the saying in the *Diamond Sutra*: “all sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity”. It is especially noticeable that although there are differences among the sages and highly respected scholars, the *Diamond Sutra* does not judge who is right and who is wrong. This attitude of “seeking truth from facts” conceives a grand principle for religions to tolerate and accept one other.

According to my observation, every religion has been striving to prove the existence of their god, generation after generation, but inevitably fail to locate any substantive evidence. This leads to the conclusion that all religions share the identical aim of searching for the Truth. Just as what the *Diamond Sutra* says, their differences lie in their differentiated cognizance of unconditioned phenomena.

The negative influence of religion on society is traceable through historical records. Catholicism and Protestantism originated first, followed by Islam. The discriminating minds in them evolved into hatred. During the eleventh century, Pope Urban II initiated the First Crusade, calling for Christians to regain the Holy Land controlled by Muslims at the time. From then on, the city of Jerusalem alternately



changed hands, and has suffered from wars for over a thousand years. Unfortunately, the two warring sides never came up with any solution to decently remove hatred.

The hostility between Israelis and Palestinians is indeed the continuation of the Crusades. Merely relying upon violent means is much cry and little wool. There is only one way to solve the problem and alleviate the problems arising from the exclusive views of Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The gateway is through recognizing and appreciating the fact that all the religious followers are companions on the road to the Truth. “Conditioned phenomena” and “unconditioned phenomena” in Buddhism wisely offers a method to eradicate difference between discriminating minds.

Is it necessary to repudiate the value of religion? In this contemporary world, intellectuals, mainly scientists, such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, the late Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett and Laurence Krauss, severely denounce religions that revere a creator. Readers could find these scholars’ presentations on Youtube. Some scientists even completely repudiate the value of religion. Religious circles respond by claiming that if there is no religion, there is no morality. I consider that people should not dismiss religion entirely, but not due to the moral value associated with religion. Rather, I argue that the true value of every religion lies in offering opportunities for its believers to search for the Truth.

## Chapter 6

### Principles of Buddhist Practice

Buddhism is not an abstract theory; it offers concrete principles of conduct for people to follow. The many ways to attain enlightenment are called paths to Buddhahood, or the Buddha's teachings in the words of Buddhist masters. This chapter will explain cultivating methods to readers, who will be eager to know about how to take the path to Buddhahood when they realize the core value of Buddhism.

The Buddha says that there are eighty-four thousand permutations of the Buddhist teaching; this is a convenient way to connote the infinity of Buddhist teachings. We ought to know that Buddhism offers infinite paths to help us attain the same aim of enlightenment.

In addition, because of their different backgrounds, Buddhist learners vary in understanding the teachings. The method for one may not suit the others. Suppose a Buddhist teacher asks you to study five books, which makes you feel perplexed at first sight, but which enlighten you when you have read them several times. This is referred to as "gradual enlightenment". The same teacher may ask another student to read the same books. The other student may immediately understand what enlightenment is by glimpsing at the first few pages. This is so-called "sudden enlightenment". This type of enlightenment is not in contradiction to "gradual enlightenment".

The Empress Wu Zetian (648-705), the only female ruler in Chinese history, firmly believed and advocated Buddhism. As the supreme leader of the empire, she made the order to summon Huineng, the sixth patriarch of the Zen school, to come to court. Huineng declined the royal decree. Empress Wu was infuriated, and was about to issue the order to arrest Huineng when she suddenly realized that Master Huineng was teaching her through the refusal. She decided not to blame Huineng and force him to come, but instead generously bestowed on him. The Zen school thus widely spread in the South. Having attained a higher level of Buddhist understanding, the Empress herself allegedly wrote the opening chant of a sutra: “Hard it is to meet with the teaching that is unsurpassed, most profound, most excellent, in myriads of eons. Now we have met with it, may we realize the true meaning of the Buddha!”

It is said that the renowned poet Su Dongpo of the Song dynasty was another enlightened person. One day, when he saw some green bamboo leaves and a stream of water, he was suddenly enlightened:

“The sounds of running stream are the Buddha’s oral preaching in a broad and long tongue; the sight of mountains is the pure Dharma body”.<sup>1</sup> Anything we see could help us realize the Truth about Buddhism. There are various ways for one to cultivate our understanding, since there are endless causes to enlighten one. The *Diamond Sutra* stresses that “all things are Buddha-dharma”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “溪聲盡是廣長舌，山色無非淨法身。”

<sup>2</sup> 金剛經第 17 分：“一切法皆是佛法。”

The highest form of Buddhist learning is called the “supreme perfect enlightenment”<sup>3</sup> (Skt. *anuttarāṃ samyak-saṃbodhim abhisambuddhāḥ*). The *Diamond Sutra* also notes that there is no set doctrine to attain the supreme perfect enlightenment, which illustrates that “all things are Buddha-dharma”. We understand that Buddhist teaching is vastly inclusive, which have developed a variety of schools in the past centuries. We will discuss these different schools in Chapter 20.

This chapter, which provides some cultivation guides for peer practitioners, is divided into two parts: Part I contains some quotations of scriptures that categorise the three levels of achievement in Buddhism. It begins with the most basic level, instructing us on moral restraints and rules, which are comparable to the Ten Commandments in Christianity. Part II offers some advice on how to cultivate. These guides are intended to be of great practical value to beginners.

## **Part I: An outline of cultivation in terms of Buddhist scriptures**

Now, let us focus on a direct method of cultivation, which is the “three kinds of meritorious behaviour” or “Three Blessings of Tranquility”<sup>4</sup> taught by the Buddha in the *Contemplation Sutra*.

### **Three Blessings of Tranquility**

The *Contemplation Sutra* records the Buddha’s elucidations in response to the questions raised by Vaidehī, the wife of King

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<sup>3</sup> 無上正等正覺.

<sup>4</sup> 淨業三福.

Bimbisāra of Magadha. Understanding the essence of every meritorious behaviour (“Blessing”) is the key; each of them represents one stage in the path to attainment.

## 1. The Blessing of Heaven and Man<sup>5</sup>

This first “blessing” teaches us the obligations and responsibilities we need to fulfill. It especially emphasizes the importance of filial piety for parents and respect for teachers. Whether you are a disciple of Hinayana Buddhism or Mahayana Buddhism, you will have to follow what you have learned. It teaches us the following:

- 1) We must support and take care of our parents.
- 2) We must pay attention to our teachers.
- 3) We must remain compassionate and refrain from killing any humans or animals.
- 4) We must cultivate the ten kinds of benevolent behaviours
  - a. not killing
  - b. not stealing
  - c. not committing adultery
  - d. not being greedy
  - e. not being angry
  - f. not having wrong views
  - g. not lying
  - h. not speaking harshly
  - i. not speaking divisively
  - j. not speaking idly

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<sup>5</sup> 人天福.

Items a, b, and c are behavioural; items d, e, and f are psychological; items g, h, i, and j are verbal.

### **Filial Piety**

According to Chinese culture, filial piety possesses the greatest virtue. It is often said that “Filial piety is the foundation of all virtues”. This principle is far more than loving one’s parents and providing financial support to them. Parents are always concerned about the happiness of their children. As their children, we must avoid doing anything that would potentially worry them. People come to realize that parents expect their young children to become benevolent, law-abiding, and responsible citizens. One would be considered to be filial only if one lives up to such parental expectations.

Filial piety is also the primary quality a Buddhist follower has to learn in the initial stage. A person cannot be considered successful in cultivation without such quality. Some Western scholars comment that the value of Buddhism contradicts that of Confucianism. Buddhists seemingly advise sons and daughters to leave their families and get away from the secular world; in contrast, Confucians consider the family as the foundation of a society. However, I am afraid that I have to negate this point of view. This is because Buddhism never asks a young person to renounce the secular life against the wishes of his or her parents. Truly speaking, both Confucianism and Buddhism take filial piety as the most important virtue.

## 2. The Blessing of the Second Carriage<sup>6</sup>

This “blessing” involves methods and ritual protocols of Buddhism. It begins from the ritual of converting to Buddhism, a process that is quite similar to Christian baptism. The second “blessing” asks Buddhist learners to fulfill three requirements:

### 1) Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures.

This refers to the rituals of formally joining Buddhism, which include:

- a. taking refuge in the Buddha, that is, to be awakened to the reality without perplexity;
- b. taking refuge in the Dharma, that is, to have correct understanding without deviation;
- c. taking refuge in the Sangha, that is, to attain purity without pollution.

Huineng, the sixth patriarch of the Zen School, refers to the same process with a different name. He calls this the “triple jewels of one’s intrinsic nature”, which include “refuge to awakening, refuge to correct knowledge, and refuge to purity [of mind]”.

### 2) Maintaining the precepts

The precepts are: (1) not killing, (2) not stealing, (3) not committing adultery, (4) not lying, and (5) not drinking. The first four of the five precepts are precepts of a fundamental nature that are applicable to everyone. The

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<sup>6</sup> 二乘福.

fifth belongs to precepts for faults that require special restraint; this precept applies only to those who have accepted these rules. The prohibition of drinking aims to prevent drunken mistakes from happening.

### **3) Refraining from misconduct of the practices**

This means that our conduct and behaviours shall be honourable but not shameful in upholding Buddhism.

## **3. The Blessing of the Big Carriage<sup>7</sup>**

This “blessing” refers to:

- 1) Awakening to the aspiration for enlightenment for the sake of helping all living beings. This requires the combination of great intelligence, compassion, and bodhisattva practices.
- 2) Profoundly believing in the law of cause and effect.
- 3) The need to read and appreciate the Big Carriage scriptures.
- 4) Encouraging others to accumulate virtue.

This third Blessing of the Big Carriage deals with a person’s mindset in the final state of cultivation. The selfless Bodhi-wisdom to help other sentient beings is pivotal and ultimate in Buddhism. We have to strive to restore our “intrinsic nature”; in order to do so, we have to help others selflessly and not allow our minds to be concerned with anything else. In other words, we must help others for the

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<sup>7</sup> 大乘福.



sake of others, but not for public approval or fame. We must not bear in mind the reward it has for now and the benefits it will reap in the future. We have to keep in mind that compassion has to be intrinsic, and therefore we shall utilize all kinds of opportunities to cultivate our compassion. Our compassion shall never be caused by any other motive, even if it comes out of our responsibility to do good deeds.

The first and second blessings are regarded as Hinayana teachings, while the third one is seen as the core of Mahayana Buddhism. Three kinds of blessings offer a step-by-step approach for followers to learn Buddhism. The Buddha has pointed out this out in the *Buddha Conservation Sutra*: “If a student of Buddhism does not continue his learning from Hinayana to Mahayana Buddhism, then he is not qualified as a true Buddhist”. That is to say, a Buddhist student has to begin with the first and second prior to learning the third blessing.

Chapter 19 will explain the distinctions between the Hinayana tradition and the Mahayana tradition. While Hinayana Buddhism is extremely widespread among Southeast Asian countries, Mahayana Buddhism is mostly practiced in mainland China and Taiwan. Conventionally, many Western scholars of Buddhism have sought guidance from Buddhists living in Southeast Asia; this is why they often have focused on Hinayana doctrines and teachings, which differ from the Mahayana tradition.

As the *Buddha Conservation Sutra* demonstrates, the Buddha considers the two traditions as teachings at two different levels. The Hinayana tradition belongs to the elementary level; it lays down a necessary foundation for further cultivation. This is why a person has to study the Hinayana tradition before advancing to the higher level.

Today, we have explained the distinctions between Hinayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. This provides a perfect response to the viewpoint that the two traditions are contradictory. Chapter 19 will further elaborate on the two traditions. According to statements made over two thousand years ago, Hinayana and Mahayana teachings belong to two different levels of cultivation.

**In Buddhism, what is the most important attitude we shall adopt when we deal with others? Is there a certain route to follow in the process of Buddhist learning?**

The most important attitude in Buddhism is compassion. There is no set route. The best way to learn is to find the dharma gate that is most suitable and convenient for you personally. That is to say, “compassion is the foundation, and convenience is the method”.

## Part II: Some advice on how to cultivate

Below is some basic advice for those who would like to further explore Buddhism and obtain concrete methods after reading this book. The author suggests that readers should repeatedly study the following items after finish reading the book. This practice will remind readers of dos and don'ts during cultivation.

1. Comprehend fundamental concepts of Buddhism.
2. Be vigilant about craving, aversion, and ignorance. Avoid delusion, discrimination, and clinging. Although these things are not easy, we shall at least endeavour to do. Even the slightest achievement with respect to any of these is praiseworthy.
3. Learn the three kinds of meritorious behaviour ("Blessings").
4. Learn the Six Paramitas. (These will be explained in Chapter 11.)<sup>8</sup>
5. Remember that Buddhism teaches us to "learn from different kinds of suffering".<sup>9</sup> Do not indulge in luxurious enjoyment, but live a moderate life. The *Platform Sutra of*

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<sup>8</sup> The Six Paramitas are: giving away, observing precepts, patience, diligence, deep concentration, and wisdom.

<sup>9</sup> "以苦為師". This idea originally appeared in the *Sutra of the Deathbed Injunction*, in which the Buddha has pointed out that disciples of the Buddha should take the precepts and sufferings as their teacher. He noted that "[Precepts] are your Great Teacher, which are as me [the Buddha] in this world without any differences."

*the Sixth Patriarch* notes that “the Buddha’s teachings in this world cannot be appreciated without worldly references”.<sup>10</sup> Buddhist learners shall always be prepared to set examples for others. If I were a businessman, I ought to do what a businessman shall do and set a good example for fellow businessmen. The same principle applies to political leaders.

6. Understand Section 17 of the *Diamond Sutra*, which states that “All dharmas are the Buddha-dharma”<sup>11</sup>. Any event we come across may be the Buddha’s dharma that triggers enlightenment. During cultivation, we call the highest state of mind the “supreme correct enlightenment”, or “anuttarā-samyak-saṃbodhi” in Sanskrit. The *Diamond Sutra* points out that the mind of “supreme correct enlightenment”<sup>12</sup> is caused by the absence of a set doctrine, which can be used to explain the saying that “All dharmas are the Buddha-dharma”.
7. Cherish and appreciate everything you encounter in life. You will be tested by ordeals in different stages of your life: sometimes everything goes smoothly without a hitch; at other times, you will encounter challenges. You may suffer from different levels of difficulties and hardships. You shall always maintain such an attitude that takes every experience as a learning opportunity.

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<sup>10</sup> 六祖壇經: “佛法在世間, 不離世間覺.”

<sup>11</sup> 金剛經第 17 分: “一切法皆是佛法.”

<sup>12</sup> 無上正等正覺.

8. Confucius once said, “walking among three people, there must be someone from whom I can learn”. Both good people and bad people are our teachers. We shall learn about benevolent behaviours from good men and avoid vicious crimes of bad men.

Attention: everywhere you stay could be a site of enlightenment for self-cultivation. Everyone you meet, whether a good person or not, can be seen as a mirror to you. They are your teachers, while you are the only student.

9. If for some reason(s) you are deceived, you can take the deception as an opportunity of a trial for you to detach from wrath, one of the three poisons. When one is fooled, one would very likely get angry; however, this is not an appropriate attitude, as one shall not let others' crimes damage one's own cultivation.
10. The third doctrine of the “Six Paramitas” teaches us to be patient and tolerant. (This will be explained in Chapter 11). You may treat someone with sincerity, but somehow this person is always devoid of gratitude, deceiving you, hurting you, and defiling you. You may therefore question where the justice is. But in effect, you shall take this matter as an opportunity to test your patience. If you understand the principle of the inevitable relationship between cause and consequence, you will realize that the injustice and predicament you are suffering from might have been caused by something you did to some people in your past lives. The enemies you encounter in this life

may have been trying to let you repay your debts. You shall have the courage to take on the results as to avoid endless mutual injuries. Some of our friends with secular views might consider that you are making such a major concession to relinquish your interests. And yet, Buddhism tells us that what we have attained in our cultivation could be wiped out in a day if we do not practice patience.

11. What is the correct attitude towards fortune? Should we be eager to get rich? Should we yearn for higher social status? About the first question, we must ensure that we do not acquire our wealth through improper means, which is to say that we cannot comprise ourselves to craving, aversion, and ignorance. Besides, if one's original motive already takes the interests of others into account, then there is no problem for one to pursue social status and wealth (a right behaviour of the eight noble paths). Buddhism is not opposed to people like Bill Gates earning worldly wealth through correct paths, and encourages them to run charities with their money.
12. If you live comfortably and your career goes smoothly, you shall pause to contemplate, feeling grateful for what you own, and choose a moderate rather than a luxurious life even if you would like to treat yourself generously. Maintaining a reasonable living standard sets a role model for people with the same social status. We shall always remember to avoid craving, aversion, and ignorance. The Buddha teaches us that what we possess and enjoy are illusions and bubbles. Nothing is eternal

and the environment constantly changes. We must learn the necessity of giving away.

13. When handling our relationships with others, we must bear in mind the teachings of Buddha and maintain five states of mind: i) sincerity, ii) purity, iii) equality, iv) correct awakening, and v) compassion.<sup>13</sup>
14. There are five attitudes to life<sup>14</sup>: i) to see through things; ii) to cast off attachment; iii) to feel comfortable in spite of such abandonment; iv) to be in accord with circumstances; v) to remember the teachings of Buddha.
15. We shall continuously practice paramita of giving away, for example, helping others without asking for anything in return. During the process, you should “give away to help others without any link or attachment to other considerations”<sup>15</sup>, as the *Diamond Sutra* asks. This is considered the highest aim of cultivation. The ultimate purpose of cultivation is to learn and practice Bodhi Resolve; the goal is to reach perfection.
16. Human life is as fragile as morning dew and as ephemeral as lightening—it can disappear anytime. As the Diamond Sutra says, “An illusion, a drop of dew, a bubble, a dream, a flash of lightning’, a thunder cloud - This is the way one should see the conditioned”. It is clear that we will not be able to take away with us anything after death, except for

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<sup>13</sup> 真誠; 清淨; 平等; 正覺; 慈悲.

<sup>14</sup> 看破; 放下; 自在; 隨緣; 念佛.

<sup>15</sup> 應無所住行於布施.

the wholesome and unwholesome actions we have done in the past. Thus, it is said that “All kinds of things but karma will be gone”.

In the above, we have discussed different cultivating methods from two perspectives. The first is to learn from Buddhist classics (the *Contemplation Sutra*); the second is to collect some advice on how to cultivate. Buddhist sutras have offered so many invaluable methods that help people to cultivate. I will share with readers two of the methods:

### **Method 1:**

The *Diamond Sutra* says that “when giving away to help others, there should not be any link or attachment to other considerations”.<sup>16</sup> This straight-forwardly expounds the correct attitude one shall hold. This means that we should not become attached to the faculties of form, sound, smell, taste, tactility, and thought while making generous donations. Consequently, this indicates that, when practicing giving away, one shall not stick to the conceptual marks of self, personhood, sentient being, and being long-lived. We shall always help others with a pure and unsullied mind.

The aforementioned method that applies Buddhist theories to real life is so easy; but the question is, can we ordinary people cast off the attachments?

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<sup>16</sup> 應無所住行於布施. Section 4 of the *Diamond Sutra*.



## Method 2:

The author suggests that we also read the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, which quotes the *Sutra of the Bodhisattva Precepts* that “My intrinsic nature is originally pure...I see my pure nature in each recitation; I cultivate and practice myself, and establish my path to the Buddhahood”<sup>17</sup>.

The phrase of “my intrinsic nature is originally pure” demonstrates that the original nature of human beings is pure, which more or less resonates with the Confucian discourse of the Goodness of Human Nature.

The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* says that “The intrinsic nature is originally pure and certain, but defiled and polluted because we long for the conditions we once perceived”. In the thinking processes, our originally pure nature is defiled and polluted. The sutra also states that “[We ought to] cultivate and practice ourselves, and attain Buddhahood”. But how so? The sutra provides detailed methods of cultivation. The sixth chapter, which is on repentance and reform, says that “To take refuge is to rid your self-nature of egotism and unwholesome thoughts as well as of jealousy, obsequiousness, deceitfulness, contempt, pride, conceit, and deviant views, and all other unwholesome tendencies whenever they arise. To take refuge is to be always aware of your own transgressions and never to speak of other people’s good or bad traits. Always to be humble and polite is to have penetrated to the self-nature without any obstacle”.

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<sup>17</sup> 菩薩戒經: “我本性元自清淨.....於念念中自見本性清淨, 自修, 自行, 自成佛道.”

How does one attain Buddhahood by one's own practice? "Practice" here refers to *prajñā*, the Buddhist wisdom. Chapter 2 of the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, "Prajñā" states that "If we steadily, at all times and in all places, keep our thoughts free from foolish desire and act wisely on all occasions, then we are practicing the *paramita* of *prajñā*. One foolish notion is enough to shut-off *prajñā*; one wise thought will bring it forth again". This discourse, along with the above quotation from the *Sutra of the Bodhisattva Precepts*<sup>18</sup>, vividly illustrates the Way of Personhood.

Below is the "Formless Verse"<sup>19</sup> taught by Master Huineng. Instead of promulgating superstitious beliefs, it teaches Buddhist followers about the ways of self-cultivation at home.

For a fair mind, observation of precepts is unnecessary.

For straightforward behaviour, practice in contemplation may be dispensed with.

On the principle of gratefulness, we support our parents and serve them filially.

On the principle of righteousness, the superior and the inferior stand for each other [in time of need].

On the principle of mutual desire to please, the senior and the junior are on affectionate terms,

On the principle of forbearance, we do not quarrel even in the midst of a hostile crowd.

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<sup>18</sup> *Sutra of the Bodhisattva Precepts*: "My intrinsic nature is originally pure [...] I see my pure nature in each recitation; I cultivate and practice myself, and establish my path to the Buddhahood."

<sup>19</sup> 六祖壇經: 無相頌.

If we can persevere till fire can be obtained through  
rubbing a piece of wood,  
Then the red lotus [the Buddha-nature] will shot out  
from the black mire [the unenlightened state].

That which is of bitter taste is bound to be good  
medicine.

That which sounds unpleasant to the ear is certainly  
frank advice.

By amending our mistakes, we get wisdom.  
By defending our faults, we betray an unsound mind.

In our daily life we should always practice altruism,  
But Buddhahood is not to be attained by giving away  
money as charity.

Bodhi is to be found within our own mind,  
And there is no necessity to look for mysticism from  
without.

Hearers of this stanza who put its teaching into actual  
practice,  
Will find paradise in their very presence.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “心平何勞持戒？行直何用修禪？  
恩則孝養父母，義則上下相憐；  
讓則尊卑和睦，忍則眾惡無喧。  
若能鑽木取火，淤泥定生紅蓮。  
苦口的是良藥，逆耳必是忠言；  
改過必生智慧，護短心內非賢。  
日用常行饒益，成道非由施錢；  
菩提只向心覓，何勞向外求玄？  
聽說依此修行，天堂只在目前。”

## Chapter 7

### Buddhist Sutras

The Buddhist sutras mainly record the dharmas taught by the Sakyamuni Buddha during his lifetime.<sup>1</sup> According to the *Sutra of the Deathbed Injunction*, the Buddha (Sakyamuni) was once asked about what kind of guidance people should rely upon for cultivation and whom they should follow after his extinction. The Buddha replied that learners should take the precepts as their guideline rather than blindly following the views of so-called authoritative persons; learners should follow good and reliable teachers.

They should follow the four Dharma reliances: 1) reliance on the Buddhist teachings rather than the teacher; 2) reliance on the meaning rather than the letter of the teachings; 3) reliance on true wisdom rather than on discriminating cognition; 4) reliance on the complete teaching sutras rather than on sutras that contain incomplete teachings.<sup>2</sup>

This advice will benefit humans in the long run. The Buddha particularly warns us not to uphold differentiation and attachment. Therefore, it is against the doctrines of Buddhism to establish an authoritarian institution, which would be like the Vatican, to overrule the entire Buddhist world. The formation of different schools of thought is the natural result of Buddhist

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<sup>1</sup> The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* is the only exception. Its author, Master Huineng, was an eminent monk who attained the Buddha way in Mahayana Buddhism.

<sup>2</sup> 四依止法：依法不依人，依意不依語，依智不依識，依了義不依不了義。

development. On the negative side, the absence of an authoritarian institution allows those who do not understand the background of Buddhism to raise questions about the validity of the religion; on the positive side, it has avoided disputes among different schools of thought.

After attaining Buddhahood, the Buddha taught for forty-nine years. In three periods, the sutras were compiled by his five hundred disciples. In the latter half of this book, we will discuss why different scholars advocate the sutras of different schools. All sutras share the common purpose: they all aim to teach us to attain perfection. Esoteric Buddhism calls this attainment the Vast Perfection. Other sects call this attainment the Reality-Nature, which means the perfection of intrinsic nature.

Here I would like to introduce a key figure, Master Xuanzang of the Tang (602-664) who brought Buddhist classics back to China. During his sixteen-year pilgrimage to India, Master Xuanzang had to undergo many hardships and obstacles, and to hide from border patrols. He learned Buddhist classics and Sanskrit. After bringing back Buddhist texts to China, he translated them into Chinese. He travelled across China to lecture on the Dharma, making an enduring contribution to the promotion of Buddhism. We sincerely appreciate what he did to enable our learning Buddhism conveniently. His influence on Chinese culture is profound and lasting. It is said that he was escorted by an armed force with twenty horses to bring 657 volumes of sutras back to China.<sup>3</sup> It would be impossible to describe each of the sutras in depth, but I would like to remark on the significance of

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<sup>3</sup> Yang Zengwen, *Zhongguo fojiao jichu zhishi* (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2005), 61-64.

this achievement for readers. The Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras are in such a large quantity that they easily surpass the general reading requirements of any doctoral syllabi at any university.

Generally, the following sutras are more well-known:

1. The *Sutra of the Meditation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*<sup>4</sup>: Concepts such as the three kinds of meritorious behaviour (Chapter 6), the Six Paramitas (Chapter 11), three general aspects of Buddhist practice (Chapter 14), and six harmonious ways (Chapter 15) find their references in this sutra.
2. The *Sutra on the Past Vows of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva*<sup>5</sup> is known for its emphasis on filial piety, which is also called the “Book of Filial Piety” in Buddhism.
3. The *Amitabha Sutra*<sup>6</sup> illustrates the conditions for rebirth in the pure land and describes the western paradise. This is a renowned classic in the Pure Land School.
4. The *Sutra Spoken by Buddha on the Way of Ten Meritorious Deeds*<sup>7</sup> is an introductory classic in Hinayana Buddhism.
5. The *Big Eight Appreciations Sutra*<sup>8</sup> is very helpful for beginner Buddhists.

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<sup>4</sup> 觀無量壽經.

<sup>5</sup> 地藏菩薩本願經.

<sup>6</sup> 佛說阿彌陀經.

<sup>7</sup> 佛說十善業道經.

<sup>8</sup> 八大人覺經.

6. The *Nirvāṇa Sutra*<sup>9</sup> expounds the concept of *nirvāṇa*, the condition that surpasses life and death. In the meantime, it offers explanations on the Four Noble Truths.
7. The *Flower Ornament Sutra*<sup>10</sup> is considered the classic of classics. Buddhist practitioners take this sutra as a recipe for correcting their faults. The Flower Ornament School considers it the major classic (See Chapter 20).
8. The *Heart Sutra*<sup>11</sup> is written euphuistically, revealing profound ideas in short passages. It might be the Buddhist classic that is recited most frequently in the world. If you understand this sutra, you will understand the principles (buddha-nature, mind-nature, etc.), ideas and effects of cultivation in Buddhism.
9. The *Diamond Sutra*<sup>12</sup> is a classic for the refutation of characteristics and uncovering of enlightenment. Many people recite this sutra, as it is an extremely important classic in Mahayana Buddhism. The author especially introduces the intelligible version collectively annotated by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng and others.
10. The *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma*<sup>13</sup>, which is also called the *Lotus Sutra*, is a major classic in the Tiantai School.

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<sup>9</sup> 涅槃經.

<sup>10</sup> 佛說大方廣佛華嚴經.

<sup>11</sup> 般若波羅蜜多心經

<sup>12</sup> 金剛般若波羅密經.

<sup>13</sup> 妙法蓮花經 or 法華經.

11. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*<sup>14</sup> is the principle classic in the Chan School, containing the teachings of Master Huineng.

The author has selected two examples, the *Bodhisattva's Big Eight Appreciations Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra*, in order to give readers some general idea about what contents are included in a sutra.

### **The Bodhisattva's Big Eight Appreciations Sutra**

This sutra is quite short. Divided into eight sections, the sutra tells us about real situations in the world and teaches us the eight key points of learning Buddhism, how to deal with people, and the reasons and purposes of our cultivation. Below is the translation of this sutra.

#### **The First Appreciation**<sup>15</sup>

Nothing is permanent in this world.

The security of our land is brittle.

Matters<sup>16</sup> are sadly void in essence.

The five elements we encounter<sup>17</sup> are not part of us.

The very existence of things comes and goes.

It is deceptive and devoid of a central theme.

The mind is the source of all evils.

The appearance provides evidence of sin.

If we can look at things from this perspective,

Gradually, we shall feel detached of life and death.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 六祖壇經.

<sup>15</sup> “第一覺悟：世間無常。國土危脆。四大苦空。五陰無我。生滅變異。虛偽無主。心是惡源。形爲罪藪。如是觀察。漸離生死。”

<sup>16</sup> Including the four elements making up the substances: earth, fire, water, and wind.

<sup>17</sup> Including the five constituent elements of all existences: form (色), feeling (受), conception (想), impulse (行), and consciousness (識).

<sup>18</sup> Meaning we shall enter into a state of nirvana.



### **The Second Appreciation<sup>19</sup>**

Avarice is the cause of suffering.  
Life and death is tiring,  
It all starts from greed.  
If we compress our desire,  
We will find peace in our minds and bodies.

### **The Third Appreciation<sup>20</sup>**

If we have no limit in our desire,  
And keep on seeking material wealth and glory,  
We will aggravate our sinful karma.  
Bodhisattva cannot approve.  
Always feel satisfied with what you have.  
Be content in poverty and mindful of the dharma teaching.  
Exercise wisdom in handling your affairs.

### **The Fourth Appreciation<sup>21</sup>**

Laziness in our practice will make us fall.  
We should always practice diligence.  
It will break up our afflictions,  
Subdue the four forms of demons,<sup>22</sup>  
And keep us away from the confinement of Hell and suffering.

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<sup>19</sup> “第二覺知：多欲爲苦，生死疲勞，從貪欲起，少欲無爲，身心自在。”

<sup>20</sup> “第三覺知：心無厭足，唯得多求，增長罪惡，菩薩不爾，常念知足，安貧守道，唯慧是業。”

<sup>21</sup> “第四覺知：懈怠墮落，常行精進，破煩惱惡，摧伏四魔，出陰界獄。”

<sup>22</sup> Including the anxiety demon (煩惱魔), the body demon (五陰身魔), the heavenly demon (天魔), and the death demon (死魔).

### **The Fifth Appreciation<sup>23</sup>**

Breaking away from the ignorance of life and death,  
Is constantly the thought of Bodhisattva.  
We need to be well read,  
To enhance our wisdom and ability, and  
To gain eloquence  
In order that we may teach the truth,  
So that all will get enlightened and feel happy.

### **The Sixth Appreciation<sup>24</sup>**

In the midst of poverty and grievances,  
It is not easy to avoid facing bad karma.  
The Bodhisattva will extend equal compassion to all.  
Do not differentiate between  
Those who love us and those who hate us.  
Do not think of other people's errors, and  
Do not hate wicked people.

### **The Seventh Appreciation<sup>25</sup>**

It is wrong to overindulge in human desires.  
Although we are human,  
We should not contaminate ourselves with worldly pleasure.  
Always remember the triple gem,  
And the basic needs of life.  
Be prepared to sacrifice your daily routine;  
Adhere to your ideals and purity.  
Whilst the route towards divinity has a long way to go,  
We extend compassion to all.

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<sup>23</sup> “第五覺悟：愚癡生死，菩薩常念，廣學多聞，增長智慧，成就辯才，教化一切，悉以大樂。”

<sup>24</sup> “第六覺知：貧苦多怨，橫結惡緣，菩薩布施，等念怨親，不念舊惡，不憎惡人。”

<sup>25</sup> “第七覺悟：五欲過患，雖為俗人，不染世樂，常念三衣，瓦鉢法器，志願出家，守道清白，梵行高遠，慈悲一切。”

### **The Eighth Appreciation<sup>26</sup>**

In the midst of life and death,  
Our being is full of problems and anxiety.  
Take the Mahayana vows to assist.  
Be willing, on behalf of all sentient beings,  
To bear their sufferings so as to,  
Enable all sentient beings to receive the ultimate happiness.

### **Conclusion<sup>27</sup>**

These eight appreciations make up  
What the enlightened one has in mind.  
Practice on the right path with due diligence.  
Cultivate compassion and build up wisdom.  
Join the vehicle of dharma,  
To reach the shores of nirvana.

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<sup>26</sup> “第八覺知：生死熾然，苦惱無量，發大乘心，普濟一切，願代衆生，受無量苦，令諸衆生，畢竟大樂。”

<sup>27</sup> “如此八事，乃是諸佛菩薩大人之所覺悟。精進行道，慈悲修慧，乘法身船，至涅槃岸。”

## Heart Sutra

This literature is considered very important in Buddhist learning, regardless of different schools of thought. Secular families would post calligraphic writings of the Heart Sutra, for the purpose of decoration and admiration of the Buddha's teachings.

However, it is estimated that only a few could understand the true meaning of the *Heart Sutra*. It is beyond the introductory level to explain this sutra at this stage. But the author believes that readers will have had some basic understanding of the *Heart Sutra* after reading this book.

Below I have provided the scriptural texts of the *Heart Sutra* for reference.

When Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was practicing the profound *Prajñāpāramitā*, he illuminated the Five Skandhas and saw that they were all empty, and crossed over all suffering and affliction.

Śāriputra, form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form. Sensation, conception, synthesis, and discrimination are also such as this.

Śāriputra, all dharmas are empty - they are neither created nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, and they neither increase nor diminish. This is because in emptiness there is no form, sensation, conception,

synthesis, or discrimination. There are no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or thoughts. There are no forms, sounds, scents, tastes, sensations, or dharmas. There is no field of vision and there is no realm of thoughts. There is no ignorance nor elimination of ignorance, even up to and including no old age and death, nor elimination of old age and death. There is no suffering, its accumulation, its elimination, or a path. There is no understanding and no attaining.

Because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas rely on *Prajñāpāramitā*, and their minds have no obstructions. Since there are no obstructions, they have no fears. Because they are detached from backward dream-thinking, their final result is *nirvāṇa*.

Because all buddhas of the past, present, and future rely on *Prajñāpāramitā*, they attain *Anuttarā Samyaksaṃbodhi*.

Therefore, know that *Prajñāpāramitā* is a great spiritual mantra, a great brilliant mantra, an unsurpassed mantra, and an unequalled mantra. The mantra of the *Prajñāpāramitā* is spoken because it can truly remove all afflictions. The mantra is spoken thusly: “gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā”.

## Chapter 8

### The Four Noble Truths

There are the doctrines of “Four Noble Truths”<sup>1</sup> enunciated by the Buddha in his first sermon, the first turning of the wheel of the Dharma.

The first Noble Truth is “suffering”, which explains the impermanence and imperfection of human life that cause humans to experience pain and frustrations.

The second Noble Truth is “arising”, which refers to all kinds of desires as the cause of suffering.

The third Noble Truth is the “cessation of suffering”, which espouses that all sufferings eventually cease.

The fourth Noble Truth is the “path leading to the extinction of affliction”, which embraces the methods to remove afflictions.

The Buddha here has taught us the “Eight Correct Paths”, which will be discussed in the next chapter. In sum, the “Four Noble Truths” is the theoretical and practical foundation of Buddhist practice that assists us to escape suffering and attain happiness.

Hinayana Buddhism sees the “Four Noble Truths” as its fundamental guidance of cultivation. If we lack a deep

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<sup>1</sup> 四聖諦. The Four Noble Truths are referred to as four characters; each character represents one truth.

understanding of the “Four Noble Truths”, we will find it difficult to enter into Mahayana Buddhism.

In the *Nirvāṇa Sutra*, the Buddha offers an invaluable elucidation on suffering. Humans encounter various kinds of suffering in the world, including both corporeal and spiritual ones. In addition, there are afflictions during the cycles of life and death.

Sometimes, corporeal pains could be healed by medicine, whereas spiritual pains could only be alleviated or eradicated by our ability to know the Truth.

The “Four Noble Truths” teach us a principle, which was originally used to relieve individual sufferings, but could also be applied to resolve other problems, such as wars on Earth.

The “Four Noble Truths” refer to the four interrelated issues<sup>2</sup>, including:

1. Suffering - determines where things go wrong.
2. Arising - affirms the reasons of suffering.
3. Cessation - reveals that there is an end to all sufferings.
4. Path - looks for methods of terminating sufferings or paths of cultivation.

If we read through Buddhist textbooks written in English, we will usually find that the discussions around the Four Noble Truths and Eight Correct Paths (see Chapter 9 for details) occupy a remarkable status. Many writers are inclined to equal

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<sup>2</sup> 苦, 集, 滅, 道.

Buddhism with the Four Noble Truths, or to consider that the Four Noble Truths occupies an important position.

From the author's point of view, the Four Noble Truths is not equivalent to Buddhism. If we take the Four Noble Truths as the central theme of Buddhism without explaining the relevant theories, we will misguide students. If we ask any Chinese person the question of what is Buddhism, we will most likely receive the following answers: "Buddhism is about the principle of karmic retribution"<sup>3</sup> or "Goodness will have a good reward". Unless someone has already had some profound understanding of Buddhism, it is likely that no one will talk about the Four Noble Truths.

Anyone who has some basic knowledge about Buddhism will realize the importance of "enlightenment", which is to change delusion into awakening, and to escape suffering and attain happiness. It is also called the restoration of "intrinsic nature". Although some books in English about Buddhism have mentioned individual "intrinsic nature", its importance is often omitted. Besides, Buddhist learning is not merely confined to the "Four Noble Truths". We are not trying to criticize other writers for placing too heavy an emphasis on the Four Noble Truths. Unfortunately, however, if someone only reads modern books in English about of Buddhism, this will hardly be sufficient to learn the gist of Buddhism.

I call on readers to pay attention to the following aspects when dealing with the "Four Noble Truths".

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<sup>3</sup> Or "causes, conditions, and consequences."



First, we must know that Buddhism teaches us to be aware of the consequences of our own behaviours (the unavoidable cause and consequence).

Second, we must understand the existence of “intrinsic nature”, which is obstructed by craving, aversion, and ignorance. We also know that our “intrinsic nature” can be restored through the elimination of craving, aversion, ignorance, delusion, discrimination, and attachment. This is to see one's own nature and accomplish Buddhahood. As long as we restore our “intrinsic nature”, we will have the wisdom to recognize the Truth. This recognition will make all the sufferings disappear, which is the so-called “changing delusion into awakening, escaping suffering, and attaining happiness”. Our “intrinsic nature” is the same as the Buddha-nature. As long as we follow the Buddha’s teachings, we will be able to successfully restore the “intrinsic nature”, entering *nirvāṇa*, and become free from the sufferings of the cycles of life and death.

Third, we must know the relationships between suffering, origination, cessation, and path.

- 1) Suffering: There are all kinds of suffering in our lives, including the suffering of birth, age, sickness and death, the suffering of not-getting, and other forms of suffering.
- 2) Accumulation: This is to know the reasons for suffering. Buddhism considers that craving, aversion, and ignorance obstruct our “intrinsic nature”. All of these lead to our misunderstandings of facts, and make our life experience unbearable. If we possess the wisdom of understanding

things, we will be able to relieve our sufferings.

3) Cessation: We know that suffering will be terminated by the restoration of “intrinsic nature”. We will thus enter so-called *nirvāṇa*.

4) Path: We know the methods of relieving pains, as our sufferings can be alleviated through the reduction of craving, aversion, and ignorance. Medical and scientific knowledge are helpful in some circumstances. I suggest that we adhere to the Buddha’s teachings, including the Eight Correct Paths. In the end, we will attain *nirvāṇa*.

When you hear a teacher talking about the Four Noble Truths, you know that the teacher refers to the abovementioned four points. I would like to inform readers that, above all, we must understand and remember the first two points, as the Four Noble Truths, causation, and the restoration of “intrinsic nature” are interrelated. Detailed discussions will be laid out in Chapter 19, which will address differences between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism.

Now that we have had a correct understanding of Buddhism and the Four Noble Truths. Let us take a look at the ways in which people deal with problems in the world today.

First of all, we must recognize all the sufferings existing in the world. If we cannot understand our sufferings, we will misdiagnose. Treating patients without an accurate diagnosis is surely futile. Now that the chaos and terror of the Middle East have spread globally, we would agree that terrorism is one of

the most serious and difficult problems in the world. Unquestionably we are all against terrorism, but terrorism itself is not the real problem. So-called terrorism is only a rhetorical expression to describe the terroristic impressions created by those criminals' monstrous crimes. They are even willing to make suicide-style attacks in order to gain compassion from others. However, they always accomplish the opposite, as civil society cannot possibly sympathize with atrocity.

Terrorism is seen as a matter of suffering from any perspective. While the real reason of this suffering is hatred, the terroristic crimes are triggered by aversion, ignorance, and craving. To terminate terrorism, we have to begin with eliminating craving, aversion, ignorance as well as ethnic hatred. The Four Noble Truths to some degree will help us resolve the problems in the world. People should appreciate the enlightenment offered by Buddhism.

## Chapter 9

### The Eight Correct Paths

The “Eight Correct Paths”<sup>1</sup> is especially favoured by followers of Hinayana Buddhism. It guides us to elevate our levels of cultivation. Of course, the ultimate purpose of cultivation is to achieve enlightenment, since it is the only way to terminate sufferings. The Eight Correct Paths include:

- 1) **Right view:** one’s view must be wholesome.
- 2) **Right thought:** one’s thinking must be in accordance with propriety.
- 3) **Right speech:** one’s speech must be in accordance with propriety.
- 4) **Right action:** one’s action must be in accordance with propriety.
- 5) **Right livelihood:** one must adopt a correct way of life and career.
- 6) **Right effort:** one must cultivate diligently, always thinking, talking, and doing what is right and not what is improper.
- 7) **Right mindfulness:** one must not have deviant thoughts. One shall not think only of oneself and disregard the interests of others.
- 8) **Right concentration:** one shall abandon one’s desires and extinguish unwholesome dharmas, and avoid being egocentric.

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<sup>1</sup> 八正道. The Eight Correct Paths are quoted from the teachings from the *Sutra on the Eightfold Noble Path*.

There is nothing particularly interesting about the Eight Correct Paths. It is not a surprise, as its principles can be easily understood and accepted by nearly everyone. We will understand these teachings once we learn them.

While our minds are still preoccupied with the correct approaches of conduct, I would like to shift our attention to another equally important teaching, which is known as the Middle Way.

### **The Middle Way<sup>2</sup>**

Sometimes, Buddhism is referred to as the “religion of the Middle Way”. Simply put, Buddhism asks us not to overly indulge or make things difficult for ourselves, suggesting that the body’s basic needs should be fulfilled in order to maintain daily routines. This explanation is rather similar to the Confucian Doctrine of Mean that promotes balance and harmony.

After doing systematic and deep research about Buddhism, we will discover the profound meaning of the Middle Way. It deals with the ways in which we interpret our surroundings.

When we see a certain object, we subjectively evaluate this object through our minds, namely, what we see. For example, when we see someone walking towards us, our minds would react in different ways. Some possibilities of how we might look upon the approaching person are:

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<sup>2</sup> 中道.

an animal walking towards us;  
a carrier of infectious bacteria approaching us;  
a possible terrorist planning an attack;  
an office employee;  
a friend wanting to greet us;  
a salesperson wanting to market her products.

What kind of judgement will we make in each and every different situation? When we apply our own minds to project what we see, we will very likely adopt a subject view in determining what it is. In other words, the mind is the pivotal element in determining and evaluating people and things in our environment.

This analysis is referred to as “All Dharmas Are One Mind”. “Mind” and “dharma” explain everything we come across, but we shall not overemphasize on either factor. On the one hand, the facts of things will help us open up the mind’s eye; on the other hand, we shall apply our minds to project a correct and subjective view of things. This is the principle of the Middle Way.

We shall not forget that the Buddha has taught us that the mind is the source of both wickedness and benevolence.<sup>3</sup> We can tell whether we are following or violating the Eight Correct Paths through observing all our behaviours and even the thoughts moving in the mind.

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<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the seventh sentence of the Section of the First Awakening in *Sutra on the Eight Kinds of Attentiveness of Great Persons*.

## Chapter 10

### The Law of Conditioned Genesis<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 2 has noted that the unavoidable chain of causation is one of the two pillars in Buddhism. Likewise, Chapter 4 has mentioned the discourse of dependent arising. In this chapter, we will explain the ways in which things arise in accordance with this rule. Buddhists believe in the Law of Conditioned Genesis (*Yuan Qi Fa*), which governs birth, death, and transformation. The *Sutra on Entering Lanka* says that “All the dharmas are causally-produced”<sup>2</sup>. This idea can be summarized in the following passages.

#### The Concept of the Arising of Myriad Things - The Law of Conditioned Genesis

The myriad things in the universe, including all the things we see and encounter in this world, do not exist without reason. Neither do they occur by chance, nor do they exist separately. We could determine the causes of things through two references: one is “cause”, and another is “condition”, which is the final element that triggers the happening of an event. “Cause” and “condition” describe the processes of everything. The two concepts sound clear and easy to understand in theory, but cannot be divided as sharp as the evidence presented in a court of law, for there are endless layers of “causes” to produce an effect. In sum, an effect can be a reason for another effect.

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<sup>1</sup> 緣起法.

<sup>2</sup> 楞伽經說：“一切法，因緣生。”

From a temporal perspective, a “cause” that initiates an effect may have existed long before a “condition” that triggers the effect. Without knowing the “condition”, the development of a thing might not be precisely predicted, but we can at least foretell that something is going to happen along a certain direction.

The Law of Conditioned Genesis explains that myriad things arise and develop in accordance with a perfect system. We should remember that not everything contains rewards and punishments. According to Buddhism, things such as the Big Bang can only be produced by certain “causes” and “conditions”. Through further examination, we will understand that “causes” and “conditions” are composed of layers of reasons. It is never possible to attribute one thing as the only reason.

“Condition” can be seen as a secondary cause or sustaining cause. It is said that the sustaining reason maintains the continuing existence of a thing.

There is an often quoted saying in Buddhism that “The accumulation of conditions lead to birth, whereas the scattering of conditions lead to death”.<sup>3</sup> This expression is usually referred to describe the separation and reunion in a love relationship. Master Shi Jingyin, the former director of the Centre of Buddhist Studies at the University of Hong Kong explains that it is very difficult to identify the particular event that initiates the cause of divorce.

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<sup>3</sup> 緣聚而生, 緣散而滅.



Some readers might ask: Is there such a thing as “fate” or “destiny”? The answer is yes. Then they might ask: If everything has been destined by our behaviours in the past worlds, is there any reason to offer up deeds of goodness in this world? The answer is yes. Even if one’s fate was originally destined to be bad, one could still alter one’s fate, as long as one carries out enough good deeds.

Chapter 4 has introduced the story of Mr. Yuan Liaofan, an official of the Ming dynasty, to illustrate the point. Buddhism teaches us that all dharmas are impermanent. Wars might come. Natural disasters might fall upon us, severely damaging our environment. Therefore, we should seize opportunities to carry out good deeds, triggering good fruits to delay or eliminate evil retribution.

I would like to tell a story of personal experience to illustrate how things could be triggered in unexpected situations.

I once made a plan to push forward cultural education in mainland China. Several years ago, I purchased a tract of land of one million square feet on the outskirts of Beijing, planning to build a “Village of Eastern and Western Cultural Communications”, in order to promote traditional Chinese culture. I commissioned the construction of a campus comprised of five buildings. I invested a rather substantial amount of money in this project, hoping to develop cultural education and to gain a reasonable profit. For some reason, this aspiration of mine was not realized, and the proper conditions did not come about for further development.

Later on, things took a strange turn. An executive of a publicly listed company with some fame falsely alleged that his company was controlled by the family of Henry Fok, a renowned philanthropist and Vice Chairperson of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. In order to fulfill my aspiration for education, I collaborated with this company, and transferred 51% shares of my investment in Beijing's campus to a branch office of this listed company in exchange for bonds issued by this branch company. However, this company never redeemed the bonds for me. It was later discovered that the alleged sharing holding of the philanthropist was also fabricated. The executive even brazenly stole 9 million Chinese yuan (approximately 1.2 million USD) under his custody. In the meantime, he made up excuses to absolve himself of responsibility, which ignited my fury. Wasn't this business fraud? Out of normal reaction, I reported all of this to the local police station in China, which never responded to or registered my report. This deeply frustrated me. I felt so sick and tired of his dishonesty.

Then, at this point in time and by coincidence, I came into contact with some of the lectures of a Buddhist teacher and I was introduced to him. This teacher's elucidation enlightened me at once. I found that it was necessary for me to adjust my attitude, especially towards evil people. I realized that hatred could only hurt myself, and that the financial loss was rooted in the causes of evil planted in the past. Now I am suffering from the "retribution". I noticed that I should try my best to publish a

book in English on Buddhism,<sup>4</sup> introducing Buddhist studies to the Western societies. As a result, this thing turned to a completely unexpected result. A seemingly failed investment led to good deeds that could not be calculated in money. It eventually led to the publication of this manuscript. I believe that from the perspective of the meaning of life, promoting Buddhism is priceless. I should even thank the evil person who indirectly triggered the publication of this book. I do not care anymore about whether or not the evil person has received a just punishment. Through my personal experience, I hope to demonstrate that we could utilize the Buddha's teachings to alter our fate and achieve happiness.

### **Twelve Related Causes<sup>5</sup>**

Buddhist theories do not only explain the arising of things, but also the processes of life and death in terms of the principles of the so-called "Twelve Related Causes". They are: ignorance, action-intentions, consciousness, name and form, the six-fold sphere of sense, contact, sensation, thirst, grasping, being, birth, and old age and death.<sup>6</sup>

This important principle of Buddhism expounds that life is not created by chance. The scenario leading to the creation and the termination of the life of a human being is explained on a step-by-step basis. Instead of offering a deep and comprehensive explanation of this principle, this book merely uses general terms to briefly describe it, for it might be too

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<sup>4</sup> Edward P. H. Woo, *Buddhism: The Big Picture Explained* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> 十二因緣.

<sup>6</sup> 十二因緣: 一無明, 二行, 三識, 四名色, 五六入, 六觸, 七受, 八愛, 九取, 十有, 十一生, 十二老死.

complex to grasp for beginners. Those who would like to know more about this principle are recommended to read other related references.

### **Summary - The Truth of the Operation of Myriad Things in the Universe**

Before ending the discussion of the Law of Conditioned Genesis and Twelve Related Causes, we ought to understand the reason why I brought up these issues. We ought to understand that these two concepts are very important in Buddhism, as they have explained the existence of the myriad things in the universe.

To understand these two concepts, we shall also consider another idea that will be introduced in Chapter 22, in which I will talk about Master Huineng's teaching that "intrinsic nature can produce all phenomena". All phenomena include all things and the system of perfection addressed in Chapter 1. In other words, intrinsic nature evolves into the system of perfection in the process of producing all phenomena. From the author's perspective, this system of perfection, together with the Law of Conditioned Genesis and Twelve Related Causes, explain life and everything in the universe.

# Chapter 11

## The Six Paramitas

Many books on Buddhism have discussed the concept of the “Six Paramitas”<sup>1</sup> (Six Perfections). These ideals can be viewed as a summary of good conduct and benevolent behaviours based upon Buddhist principles. In other words, the Six Paramitas contain all the things that a Buddhist follower should recognize and practice.

### Paramita 1: Giving away (Almsgiving)

There are three different forms of giving away<sup>2</sup> that involve the donation of wealth and service:

1. The giving of wealth. This refers to charities that are aimed at helping others, including donating money. Providing services to others is also one form of giving.
2. The giving of teaching. This type of giving assists people in understanding the truth of things, such as the Buddhist teachings. This type of giving away has more merits to the giver than monetary donations. Section 32 of the *Diamond Sutra* has clearly expounded that “If, however, any bodhisattva or mahāsattva were to fill immeasurable and incalculable world-systems with the seven treasures and make a gift of them, and if some gentleman or lady were to do no more than learn just a four-lined verse from this Perfection of Insight and memorize it, teach it, and

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<sup>1</sup> 六波羅蜜 or 六波羅密.

<sup>2</sup> 財布施, 法布施, 無畏布施.

master it, and elucidate it in full for others, the latter would generate from that a lot more merit, an immeasurable and incalculable amount”.

3. The giving of fearlessness. This protects all sentient beings from fear and maintains their peace of minds.

### **The Non-substantiality of the Three Aspects of Giving<sup>3</sup>:**

Now let us further explore the meaning of the perfection of giving away and the true essence of “compassion” as one of the six Paramitas. For Buddhist practitioners who are familiar with the idea of offering up deeds of goodness, understanding the concept of the non-substantiality of the three aspects of giving will be easy. For example, if I am planning to donate ten thousand dollars to a person who is suffering from poverty and illness, the process involves three aspects. The first aspect is “I” the benefactor; the second aspect is the beneficiary, the person being plagued by poverty and illness; the third aspect is the donation of ten thousand dollars. If my mind is concerned with thinking about the three aspects, then I would lack of the true heart of doing good things. This is because Buddhism teaches us to get rid of the three aspects of giving in order to accumulate great merits; that is, the factors such as who are the benefactors and beneficiaries, and what is the donated item become secondary. This concept is called the non-substantiality of the three aspects of giving. The ability to adopt such an attitude when helping others is true compassion which the first Paramita expects of us, and our conduct should be driven by

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<sup>3</sup> 三輪體空.

this frame of mind at all times. This resonates with the teaching of the *Diamond Sutra* that “when giving away to help others, there should not be any link or attachment to other considerations.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Paramita 2: Observing precepts**

Buddhist followers are asked to keep the precepts. Doing so provides guidance for perfect behaviour and helps one avoid evil conduct.

### **Paramita 3: Forbearance**

Forbearance is slightly different from patience. Forbearance refers to one’s self-control when facing humiliation or adversity. Adopting this attitude will dispel hatred from your mind and help you restore your “intrinsic nature”.

When confronting indignity, a Buddhist learner shall not fuel hatred. Of course this is not an easy task at all.

The paramita of forbearance means tolerance without rancor. The old saying that “Revenge is a dish that could be eaten cold” is highly misleading.

### **Paramita 4: Diligence (*jing jin* 精進)**

The character “*jing*” (精) refers to concentration, and the character “*jin*” (進) denotes unwavering effort and progress. This perfection elucidates the importance of cultivation. Only through unremitting efforts of cultivation can one attain enlightenment.

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<sup>4</sup> 應無所住而行布施.

### Paramita 5: Deep concentration (*chan din* 禪定)

Deep concentration has always been seen as an indispensable method of cultivation in Buddhism and especially in Chan Buddhism. In effect, meditation is practiced in all the Buddhist schools, but each gives the process a different name. The Sixth Patriarch Huineng offers a definition of *chan ding* in his *Platform Sutra*:<sup>5</sup>

*Chan* is “external freedom”, and *ding* is “inner tranquility”, which is also conceived as “motionlessness”. Simply put, practicing meditation not only prevents us from being influenced by the outer world, it also provides a clear goal in life. We might explain it in this way: no matter what we do, we should stick to the purpose of restoring our “intrinsic nature”.

This is probably not the same as the commonly perceived practice of *chan ding* that requires one to sit down cross-legged in a clean and quiet place. Rather than underestimating the significance of sitting meditation, the Sixth Patriarch Huineng sees the broader and deeper meaning of meditative concentration as one of the Six Paramitas.

When addressing sitting meditation, we shall notice the fact that maintaining a peaceful and tranquil mind has constantly been considered important in Chinese culture. In *Great Learning*, one of the Four Books in Confucianism, it states that: “Once the point to rest is known, the object of pursuit is then determined; and, once that is determined, an unperturbed calmness may be attained to. That calmness will be succeed by

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<sup>5</sup> *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch.*



a tranquil repose. In that repose there may be careful deliberation, and that deliberation will be followed by the attainment of the desired end”. A determined and tranquil mind will greatly benefit one’s behaviours.

### **Paramita 6: Wisdom (Skt.: *prajñā* 般若)**

This capacity helps one to clearly comprehend the nature of and interrelationship between myriad things. There are two kinds of wisdom: fundamental wisdom and subsequently attained wisdom. A Buddhist householder of the Tang dynasty, Da Yuan, explains it: “Buddhism teaches people to primarily seek the fundamental wisdom, which neither leaves marks nor discriminates. Secondly, people should pursue the subsequently attained wisdom that discriminates all dharmas”. *Prajñā* wisdom is more profound than general wisdom, for it embraces the capabilities of knowing and understanding things from the Buddha’s point of view. It is said that “*prajñā* lacks knowing; it is omniscient”. *Prajñā* wisdom lacks knowing, because it never moves or arises from any thought in the mind when facing the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, impulse, and consciousness in the world. On the other hand, the *prajñā* wisdom knows everything.

According to the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, “the self-nature of thusness gives rise to thought [...] because it is the attribute of thusness which gives rise to thought, our six sense organs, in spite of their functioning in seeing, hearing, cognition, and knowing, need not be tainted or defiled in all circumstances, and our true nature may be ‘self-manifested’ all

the time”.<sup>6</sup> The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sutra* thus says that “He who is an adept in the discrimination of various things and phenomena will be immovably installed in the ‘First Principle’”<sup>7</sup>.

The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* also offers an explanation of *prajñā*: “What is *prajñā*? It means ‘Wisdom’. If at all times and at all places we steadily keep our thought free from foolish desire and act wisely on all occasions, then we are practicing *prajñā*. One foolish notion is enough to shut off *prajñā*, while one wise thought will bring it forth again. Average people are too ignorant and delusional to see it. They talk about it with their tongues, but in their mind they remain foolish. They are always saying that they practice *prajñā*, and they talk incessantly about ‘emptiness’, but they do not know true emptiness. The mind of wisdom, which is formless and immaterial, is *prajñā*. If we interpret it in this way, then indeed we understand the wisdom of *prajñā*”.<sup>8</sup>

## Other references on the Six Paramitas

(1) An article summarizes the Six Paramitas as follows:

“The Six Paramitas begin with a heart of compassion. This is “giving away”. We know that everything has its own methods, programs. This is the observation of precepts. Be patient and persistent. This is forbearance. Be focused and assiduous. This is

<sup>6</sup> 六祖壇經：“真如有性，所以起念。”六祖壇經又說：“真如自性起念，六根雖有見聞覺知，不染萬境，而真性常自在。”

<sup>7</sup> 維摩詰經-佛國品：“能善分別諸法相，於第一義而不動。”

<sup>8</sup> 六祖壇經對“般若”亦有所解釋：“何名般若？般若者，唐言智慧也。一切處所，一切時中，念念不愚，常行智慧，即是般若行。一念愚即般若絕，一念智即般若生。世人愚迷，不見般若。口說般若，心中常愚。常自言我修般若，念念說空，不識真空。般若無形相，智慧心即是。若作如是解，即名般若智。”

diligence. Be strong-minded and independent. This is meditative concentration. Be omniscient. This is wisdom. Buddhism teaches us to apply these six paramitas in everyday life. This follows the authentic practices of the bodhisattva that lead to enlightenment.”

- (2) A Buddhist text introduces the Six Paramitas as follows (The *Dacheng Ligu Liu Boluomiduo Jing*, 大乘理趣波羅蜜多經):

“Good men and good women practitioners shall guide all sentient beings of the five destinies, pursuing the peerless correct perfect enlightenment, and distancing from non-Buddhist and false doctrines, as well as bad teachers. They should become intimate with those who cultivate, donate, observe precepts, tolerate, work hard, meditatively concentrate, replete in wisdom, and practice the teachings of the great vehicle. They should hear the correct Dharma, and to apply themselves in reciting sutras and keeping in their mind. They should always dwell comfortably onto the six paramitas. They should cultivate diligently to control the mind and protect the six faculties. Quickly realize the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment based on this momentum. It is called bodhisattva-mahāsattva. What we call the six pāramitās are give away, observe precepts, forbearance, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom. These are the six paramitas.”

## Chapter 12

### The Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva

The Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva<sup>1</sup> teaches us about how to adjust our psychological feelings when we reach the last stages of cultivating enlightenment. Let us first review a previously addressed topic. The *Flower Ornament Sutra* has provided detailed instructions on how to succeed in cultivation. After passing through the stages of “three felicitous acts”, “six harmonious ways”, “three disciplines”, a Buddhist learner will enter a new level of cultivation, which is the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva.

This book will elucidate the ten great vows, which are seen as the last steps for Buddhist learners to advance to the Buddhahood. These vows are not complex.

The ten great vows<sup>2</sup> are:

1. to worship buddhas
2. to praise tathāgatas
3. to make offerings
4. to repent sin
5. to rejoice in the merits attained by others
6. to ask the Buddha to teach the Dharma
7. to ask buddhas to stay in the world

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<sup>1</sup> 十大願王.

<sup>2</sup> 1.禮敬諸佛; 2.稱讚如來; 3.廣修供養; 4.懺悔業障; 5.隨喜功德; 6.請轉法輪; 7.請佛住世; 8.常隨佛學; 9.恒順眾生; 10.普皆回向.

8. to follow buddhas for study
9. to be friends with all beings
10. to devote his merits to the salvation of others

### **1. To worship buddhas**

In this first vow, the meaning of “buddha” is broad and general. The term “buddha” embraces all animate and inanimate beings, which are seen as the buddhas of the future in Buddhist teaching. In other words, we ought to extend our reverent attitude to everyone and everything we encounter in this world. This reverence includes not only all sentient beings and myriad things, but also our responsibilities. We should even have respect for evil people. Perfection is our goal. We can attain perfection only through our reverence toward everything.

### **2. To praise tathāgatas**

The tathāgatas in the second vow are associated with good dharmas and true dharmas that resonate with Buddha-nature. We need to distinguish the first vow from the second vow. The first vow concerns having reverence for every person - including evil persons. The second vow concerns praising perfect virtues.

### **3. To make offerings**

Making offerings is not limited to the donation of gifts or money to temples and other charitable bodies. It also refers to knowing the benefits of making offerings. Amongst all types of offerings, the offering of the Dharma is supreme. Another way to express this is to say that the most important offering is to help others dispel ignorance and

acquire truth. Buddhist followers are taught to practice this kind of offering.

**4. To repent sin**

Repentance refers to a state of mind. Having a truthful mind is of supreme importance. Buddhism does not require its followers to repent through rituals.

**5. To rejoice in the merits attained by others**

The merit of rejoicing in the progress of others is to become happy about the good deeds of other people. We must overcome jealousy. In Christianity, jealousy is viewed as a kind of sin. The goal of Buddhism is to help everyone attain Buddhahood as soon as possible. The ultimate purpose is to attain vast perfection. Animate and inanimate beings are all viewed as equally perfect and cognitive. When people around us are making achievements, this contributes to our having a cheerful state of mind. In Christian documentaries I have watched, I have occasionally observed the depiction of the improvement of a suffering person's material and spiritual conditions that is a result of their having heard the gospels. We shall not feel jealousy but become happy, in accordance with the teaching of the merit of rejoicing in the progress of others.

**6. To ask the Buddha to teach the Dharma**

It is interesting that ancient Buddhist scriptures were usually written on volumes of scrolls. "Scroll" here refers to the "wheel of the Dharma". Unrolling a written scroll would enable people to read the scriptures. A 360-degree rotation symbolizes the completion of all the scriptures on a volume.

According to the teachings of the Buddha, the wheel of the Dharma is: 1) to be able to crush all afflictions in the same way that rocks and gravels are rolled and fragmented by a giant wheel; 2) to be able to pass teachings down to generations after generations such that the spinning of the wheel never stops.

To ask the Buddha to teach the Dharma, means we should invite those qualified to interpret the Buddha's teachings-especially the implications of Buddhist scriptures.

**7. To ask buddhas to stay in the world**

Buddhist disciples shall ask good and virtuous teachers to remain in the world, to turn the wheel of the Dharma, to spread the teachings, and to benefit sentient beings.

**8. To follow buddhas for study**

The eighth vow asks learners to follow the words and deeds of the Buddha, which are contained in Buddhist scriptures.

**9. To be friends with all beings**

When we introduce Buddhist philosophy to others, we should make sure that everything we say and do is appropriate. Moreover, we shall not argue with students for the purpose of expressing our own views.

**10. To devote his merits to the salvation of others**

In Buddhism, merits are transferable. The key principle undergirding the transfer of merits is the awakened mind. Because of our compassion toward others, we are inclined

to give back merits we have earned to all sentient beings instead of saving them for ourselves. This is a particular feature of Mahayana Buddhism.

The author remembers having read an English book about Buddhism that included a discussion of rewards for others; however, this book did not explain the reason why there is such a system. The author acknowledged that this would raise questions in people's minds: will we reduce our own merits by giving away our merits to others? Is this just like depositing our money in a bank account or exchanging money for gambling chips? How are merits transferred to others? We should understand that we redistribute our merits to others out of our compassion. We are not motivated by personal favoritism toward any particular person.

### **Could the precepts of the worship of buddhas influence human behaviours?**

Let us take a look at the ways in which we apply the ten great vows in our practices of ancestral worship and their constructive effects. Assume that my grandfather was a notorious figure who was tried and sentenced as a war criminal by the international tribunal. Should I still show my respect for him? Or assume that I am a public figure whose actions are being observed. What should I tell my children about how they should think and behave with respect to their great grandfather? I can see there are several alternative attitudes:



Attitude 1): Although I know in my heart that my grandfather has committed an atrocity. Nevertheless, I can still claim his innocence and ignore the ruling of the international tribunal. Some compatriots would probably respect my blind patriotism. However, praising my grandfather's loyalty to his country while forgetting his inhumane crimes is obviously incorrect. This would send wrong messages to other people and to my own children.

Attitude 2): I may genuinely believe in my grandfather's innocence, in which case I shall absolutely respect him and ignore the ruling on his case.

Attitude 3): I shall tell my children my sincere feelings. I shall let them know that we have the obligation to guard our nation, which is respectable. But it is wrong to use patriotism as an excuse to commit inhumane atrocities. In this case, I could still explain my reverence toward my grandfather, according to the first vow of "worshipping the buddhas". Following the tenth vow, I could transfer my merits to him, in the hope that his pain will be relieved. I know that because of the thinking of all animate and inanimate beings are all viewed as equally perfect and cognitive, my grandfather will re-enter the processes of cyclic rebirth, and will even attain Buddhahood. All this reveals the compassion of the Buddha's teaching, and leads to vast perfection.

Attitude 4): I could still respect my grandfather, and pay homage to his memorial tablet, while remaining silent about his merits and demerits. Unfortunately, people will misunderstand my silence; they will mistake my silence as an expression of my support for war crimes.

Attitude 5): I could avoid visiting my grandfather's memorial tablet and explaining my mind. Before I decide to not to pay tribute, I should seriously consider my true attitude in this matter. Paying tribute to one's own grandfather is an indispensable aspect of East Asian culture. My failure to show respect to my ancestors would be taken as an indicator of my ignorance of this culture.

The second attitude may or may not be an appropriate choice, depending upon the specific circumstances and facts. If I do not take the second attitude, I am certain that I would take the third attitude. I believe that everyone will respect me for my choice.

Buddhist theory is quite profound in dissolving hatred. The best example is the pardoning of heinous criminals who suffer in Hell. Without the compassion of Buddhism, evil people would all go to Hell and would never receive redemption.

Equipped with sincerity and knowledge about Buddhism, as long as the relevant parties communicate with each other, and respect history, the enmity between Japan and its former enemies over the visits to Yasukuni Shrine would be readily

solved. This is another instance where we can see how Buddhism can help us solve our problems to foster sincere attitude and harmonious environment.

## Chapter 13

### The Four Stages to Monitor Our Cultivation

In the process of learning Buddhism, not only should we study Buddhist philosophies, we must also learn methods of cultivation and the various stages throughout our cultivation of enlightenment. The *Flower Ornament Sutra* elucidates four stages in Buddhist learning. These are faith, understanding, practice, and realization.<sup>1</sup>

#### Faith

The Buddhist faith is different from the Christian faith. Christian faith stresses the belief that God has created Earth, Heaven, and myriad things, and that he governs everything. Buddhist faith stresses cause and consequence and recognizes the existence of “intrinsic nature”. Buddhism simply asks people to have faith in themselves. Everyone has the capacity to attain Buddhahood and to be enlightened by seeing the truth of their own nature. We need to recognize our “intrinsic nature”, which is perfect but is often obstructed by our weaknesses. We need to be confident in our capacity to verify its existence through cultivation. If we can successfully eliminate all of our craving, aversion, and ignorance, we will be able to restore our intrinsic nature.

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<sup>1</sup> 信, 解, 行, 証.

## **Understanding**

It is commonly understood that everyone has the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong. Buddhism is fairly optimistic about human wisdom. Basic to Buddhist thought is the belief that all of us will be able to achieve enlightenment and thereby understand the truth of the universe and human life. Buddhism offers us a clear and concrete analysis of this understanding.

## **Practice**

Once we have gained the true understanding of the Buddhist faith and the Buddha-Dharma, we will begin to apply what we have learned in our practice. Practice is based on correct understanding. The fundamental method of practice is to show compassion all the time.

## **Realization**

Realization is the summation of our achievements. Once we are confident in our abilities, we will understand our responsibilities and will follow the Buddha's teachings to act and behave. Realization is very important. As long as we think and practice in accordance with the teaching of the sutras in our everyday life, we will attain realization.

For example: After realizing my ability to help promulgate Buddhist principles, I began to write this book and to share with interested readers my own experience. This is my "practice". If readers benefit from reading this book, then becomes part of my "realization".

## Cultivation and Enlightenment

General cultivators recognize that the purpose of cultivation is to seek enlightenment. They may become stagnated at the level of thinking without seeing any breakthrough, even though they have worked hard for a long time. Such a plateau has the potential to shake their confidence, and to lead them to question whether or not they really have the capacity to attain enlightenment.

To address this issue, the author is inspired by one of Master Shengyan's articles, and would like to share some of its insight with readers. In *Questions and Answers on Buddhism*<sup>2</sup>, Master Shengyan says:

During the practice of *chan*, we must avoid putting enlightenment as the sole target on mind by all means. We would become delusional by seeking for enlightenment but not getting it. Begging and waiting are delusion, attachment, clambering upon objects, and not letting go. Therefore, the true Zen master knows about enlightenment, but does not lust after the awakening condition. Enlightenment is a concept before cultivation, during which this concept must be cast off in order to benefit. Thus, a Zen cultivator focuses on process rather than purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> Master Shengyan, *Questions and Answers on Buddhism* (Taipei: Fagu wenhua, 2007), 195-96.

## Chapter 14

### The Three Disciplines

In learning Buddhism, we ought to bear in mind the important concept of the three disciplines: precepts, determination, and wisdom<sup>1</sup>. These are three significant aspects of Buddhism. In Sanskrit, they are referred to as *tripiṭaka*. Looking at the three aspects is a brilliant way to analyze Buddhism. The three disciplines are necessary for Buddhist beginners.

1. **Precepts:** These are also referred to as the set of rules and disciplines. Understanding precepts is very important. When one enters a foreign country, one has to comply with its laws and regulations to exempt from fear. It is said that one needs to inquire about local regulations upon entering a new territory. Only when one remains concentrated, could one be able to see through things and make wise judgements. Chapter 6 has mentioned the “five precepts” in Buddhism.
2. **Determination:** it refers to a kind of mind state, which is usually acquired through meditative practice. Chapter 11 has explained what “meditative concentration” is.
3. **Wisdom:** This has always been there. One will gain wisdom once one eliminates craving, aversion, and ignorance. Wisdom differs from the intelligence of mastering scientific

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<sup>1</sup> 戒, 定, 慧.

knowledge or facility in earning money. The “faculty of wisdom” is the foundation of wisdom, which has nothing to do with fighting for power and money.

### **Simultaneously Cultivating the Three Disciplines**

For readers who would like to take Buddhist learning seriously, I suggest them peruse and recite at least one Buddhist sutra, such as the *Sutra on the Eight Kinds of Attentiveness of Great Persons* or the *Heart Sutra* with merely 260 words. The common goal for studying any Buddhist sutra is to restore the “intrinsic nature”. Chanting a sutra could facilitate the three Buddhist practices of precepts, determination, and wisdom.

The Buddhist says: “If one is able to observe precepts and keep the rules, then his heart will be stable, peaceful, and free from disturbances. One’s object of pursuit will be determined by maintaining an unperturbed calmness in one’s mind. Precepts are therefore very important in cultivation. If one commits crimes, one’s conscience will be roused even when the government does not impose any punishment. One will not be able to cultivate determination without a calm mind. To cultivate determination, one has to have mental serenity. It is thus said that “Determination is resulted from observing precepts and wisdom grows out of determination.”

What is the very first step of serious Buddhist learning? One suggestion is that we begin from chanting a sutra. While “precepts” require us not to do anything evil, “sutras” are written in words uttered through the intrinsic nature of the Buddha. Nothing is more charming than these words. Hence,



chanting sutras are doing good things. While chanting a sutra, we need to concentrate on one point, which is the cultivation of determination. Reading every word clearly without omission is the cultivation of wisdom. If you have a hectic work schedule, you may consider reciting the *Sutra on the Eight Kinds of Attentiveness of Great Persons* or the *Heart Sutra* printed in Chapter 7.

## Chapter 15

### The Six Ways of Attaining Reverent Harmony

For Buddhist monks (or nuns) who would like to practice together, the Buddha also offers concrete precepts that are found in the *Contemplation Sutra*. These precepts provide guidelines that facilitate the maintenance of harmony within Buddhist communities consisting of three or more people.

The “six harmonious ways”<sup>1</sup> are:

1. reverent harmony in living together;
2. reverent harmony in maintaining no verbal criticism;
3. reverent harmony in sharing happiness from practising the teachings;
4. reverent harmony in observing the precepts;
5. reverent harmony in doctrinal unity in views and explanations;
6. reverent harmony in sharing benefits.

#### 1. Reverent Harmony in Living Together

This precept fosters a harmonious environment for cultivation and elevates the sense of unity amongst practitioners during the process of learning. Establishing institutional unity prevents monasteries from being treated as places for anyone wanting to escape from the world.

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<sup>1</sup> 六和敬: 1. 身和同住; 2. 口和無諍; 3. 意和同悅; 4. 戒和同修; 5. 見和同解; 6. 利和同均.

## **2. Reverent Harmony in Maintaining No Verbal Criticism**

There shall be no disputes amongst practitioners who are truly putting effort into tending the path. The most common behaviour would be gossiping when people gather together, which easily produces evil karma in form of oral activity.

## **3. Reverent Harmony in Sharing Happiness from Practicing the Teachings**

This is the so-called joy that is produced by dharmas. No matter which Buddhist school we enter, we will receive the most basic achievement - joy. If learning Buddhism does not bring us happiness, then something about our cultivating methods must be amiss. We need to identify the problem and address it.

## **4. Reverent Harmony in Observing the Precepts**

When we share the same roof during cultivation, we must have commonly accepted precepts and rules. There would be chaos without rules. These rules must apply equally to everyone. These rules should include the five fundamental precepts made by the Buddha.

## **5. Reverent Harmony in Doctrinal Unity in Views and Explanations**

Undoubtedly, our shared goal of cultivation is to attain enlightenment. Here it means that we attain enlightenment by studying under the guidance of the same school. In Chapter 20, we will discuss various Buddhist schools. To reach enlightenment, disciples of different schools cannot progress in their cultivation in the same place.

## **6. Reverent Harmony in Sharing Benefits**

We can achieve this harmony only when we equally distribute our benefits. Everyone must ensure equal treatment in every respect. It is very necessary and important to avoid the three poisons of craving, aversion, and ignorance in this area.

## Chapter 16

### Emptiness

“Emptiness”<sup>1</sup> is a common terminology and an important concept in Buddhism. Buddhist scholars have provided a variety of interpretations on this concept. A commonly accepted explanation of “emptiness” goes something like this:

Emptiness means that all dharma have no independent existence of their own, apart from the reliance on other dharma. All dharma have no real, individual essences that distinguish them from all other dharma. In other words, everything in the world, both physical and mental, is interdependent with everything else in the world. The temporary existence of each is dependent on its relations with what is not. There is no such thing as something existing on its own, separate and with no causal relation with anything else.<sup>2</sup>

This is probably the standard, classic, and most widely accepted explanation of “emptiness”. “Emptiness” and “intrinsic nature” share some common features. A basic concept in Buddhism is that nothing exists alone. But to some scholars, this theory is still not enough for us to explain the concept of “emptiness”.

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<sup>1</sup> 空.

<sup>2</sup> Epstein, Ronald B. 2003. *Buddhism A to Z*. (Taiwan: Editorial Committee of the Buddhist Text Translation Society), p. 71.

Let us try a simpler way to deal with this issue. We may present two bowls at the same time, with one that is full and another empty. This is the mundane understanding of “emptiness”.

When we see something, we naturally apply related characteristics to judge what we see. For example, seeing a luxurious car or expensive ornaments causes ideas of affluence and luxury to come to mind. When a fellow country woman is awarded an Olympic medal, her achievement makes us feel a sense of national pride. Learning the grievous news of the death of a close friend caused by a car accident immediately causes us to be sad.

According to Buddhist theories, we should try to relate all conditioned phenomena to the concept of “emptiness”, which can be seen as the real character of all dharmas.

A famous prose of the *Heart Sutra* addresses the concept of emptiness: “Form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form. Sensation, conception, synthesis, and discrimination are also such as this”.

This prose can be better understood with reference to another scriptural quote taken from the *Diamond Sutra*: “All conditioned phenomena are just illusions, like bubbles, like shadows, like dew, and lightning”. The *Diamond Sutra* instructs Buddhist practitioners in judging all things. Whatever we see is “empty”, the real character of all dharmas. “Conditioned Phenomena” include everything produced by the merging of causes and conditions.

According to the First Awakening of the *Sutra on the Eight Kinds of Attentiveness of Great Persons*, these things “always come and go. They are unreal and deceptive without a governing theme”<sup>3</sup>.

When we understand the teachings in the *Diamond Sutra* and *Heart Sutra*, we will realize that these teachings share the same purpose. The substance taught in one sutra can often be used to interpret the texts of another sutra. Simply put, the *Diamond Sutra* teaches us to give rise to the awakening mind. This means that we need to have great wisdom and compassion, and that we must perform the great vow. When we offer up good deeds, we shall neither be attached to what we see and feel, nor shall we be affected by what we see and feel. This resonates with the Buddhist saying that “when giving away to help others, there should not be any link or attachment to other considerations.”<sup>4</sup> This is equivalent to distancing the four marks of existent phenomena; this practice directly helps us to understand the meaning of “emptiness” in Buddhism.

Now let us take a look at the explanation of “emptiness” in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*: “Emptiness includes the sun, moon, stars, and planets, the great earth, mountains and rivers, all trees and grasses, bad men and good men, bad things and good things, heaven and hell; they are all in the midst of emptiness. The emptiness of human nature is also like this”.<sup>5</sup>

While understanding the shared meaning of “all conditioned

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<sup>3</sup> 八大人覺經第一覺悟：“生滅變異，虛偽無主。”

<sup>4</sup> 應無所住行於布施. Section 4 of the *Diamond Sutra*.

<sup>5</sup> 六祖壇經：“世界虛空，能含萬物色像：日月星宿，山河大地，泉源溪澗，草木叢林，惡人善人，惡法善法，天堂地獄，一切大海，須彌諸山，總在空中。世人性空，亦復如是。”

phenomena”, “emptiness” and “foamy illusion”, we shall avoid being attached to “emptiness”, the same way as we shall not be attached to “existence”. While an attachment to “emptiness” could readily generate a passive and dispirited attitude, clinging to “existence” could make us indulge in fame and wealth. We shall understand the state of “neither empty nor existing”, which is described as “marvelous existence” by Buddhists.

Analyzing the connotations of “emptiness” and the “law of conditioned genesis”, allows us to easily relate to the idea of the “emptiness of nature in all things that arises from conditions” (*yuan qi xing kong* 緣起性空). “*Yuan qi*” means that all things in the world are created by the mutual coalescing of myriad conditions. “*Xing kong*” indicates that all dharmas created by the mutual coalescing of myriad conditions are empty without real substance.<sup>6</sup>

Some scholars use the idea of “emptying one’s intrinsic nature” to question the existence of “intrinsic nature”. The author considers the issue open to discussion. All the contradictions will be resolved, so long as we understand the synonymous meaning shared by “intrinsic nature”, “Buddha-nature”, and “all dharmas are empty”. According to the *Heart Sutra*, all of these are “neither created nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, and they neither increase nor diminish”.

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<sup>6</sup> Chen Yixiao, *The Dictionary of Common Buddhist Terms* (佛學常見詞匯), 466.



Hinayana Buddhism places particular emphasis on “emptiness”, or *Śūnyatā*, a virtuous quality. Buddhadasa Bhikkuhu (1906-1993), the renowned Thai monk has written a lot about “emptiness” <sup>7</sup>:

To feel that there is nothing which is “me”

To be without worry or doubt that anything might be “me”

To feel that there is nothing that is “mine”

To be without worry or doubt that anything might be “mine”

Buddhadasa Bhikkuhu says, “At the moment that someone’s mind is freed from these four things, there exists what the Buddha maintained is voidness”. <sup>8</sup>

When we realize that everything we see is related to “emptiness”, we may question if we are adopting an overly pessimistic and escapist attitude. The answer to this question depends on what we cherish in our lives. It is impossible for those who value fame and wealth over everything else to realize the meaning of Buddhist emptiness. Giving up any opportunity to make more money is a loss to such people. But to people who are willing to help others, missing such an opportunity is certainly not an escape.

At the end of Chapter 2, I have described the distinction between “the enlightened” and “the still perplexed”. The enlightened sees the truth of myriad things, namely, the “real character of all dharmas” or “the nature of emptiness”, which can also be called as the “emptiness of all dharmas”. The still

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<sup>7</sup> Santikaro Bhikkhu, *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree: The Buddha’s Teaching on Voidness* (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2004), 53.

<sup>8</sup> Santikaro Bhikkhu, *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree: The Buddha’s Teaching on Voidness* (Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2004), 54.

perplexed, however, is still bewildered by things. The Buddhist truth that surpasses the comprehension of ordinary people is called the “ultimate truth”. By contrast, the Buddhist theories that are comprehensible to everyone fall under the “mundane truth”.

Therefore, if you find fame and wealth particularly alluring and you crave them, you may not be worried in the least. You are just one of many ordinary people who has not been able to change delusion into awakening. Nevertheless, you can play your role well within your cognitive domain. In other words, you can abide by Buddhist precepts and rules for the mundane world. If you have a job, then you should work hard; if you are a businessman, then you should strive to have a successful career. But remember that you shall always keep away from craving, aversion, and ignorance.

The world population consists of various classes of people, including the wealthy and poor, superstars and commoners. According to Buddhism, one’s aspiration for affluence or fame is nothing despicable, so long as one abandons craving, aversion, and ignorance. If those who are high and mighty participate in efforts that serve the needs of the underprivileged, they are setting a noble model for others who have a similar social status.

Before ending this discussion on “emptiness”, I feel the urge to mention my exchange with a Japanese practitioner on Buddhism that I had many years ago. I remember inquiring about this scholar’s view on the theme of Buddhism. He responded with “emptiness”, an answer that is correct on some

level, because the concepts of “emptiness” and “intrinsic nature” are interrelated. But if I were to answer this question, I would refer to the central theme of Buddhism as “enlightenment” and “restoration of intrinsic nature”. Moreover, as the aforementioned passage has stated, we shall not be attached to “emptiness” or “existence”. There are eighty-four thousand permutations to interpret Buddhism. Various interpretations of Buddhism are provided by different people for students who are at different levels. Therefore, we must avoid saying that we are right but others are not.

### A Simple Approach to Understanding Buddhism

1. The theme of Buddhism is to understand enlightenment and its implications.
2. Differentiate “the enlightened” and “the still perplexed”.
3. Remember that an enlightened person understands the “ultimate truth”, namely, the illusion of myriad things. This explanation is difficult for unenlightened people to comprehend, as they see everything as real.
4. Special cultivating approaches that belong to the “mundane truth” have been designed in Buddhism to facilitate the understanding of the Truth by people with mundane views. These approaches help the people with mundane views avoid craving, aversion, ignorance, and believe in the law of cause and effect. This way of cultivation is accessible to everyone. Understanding the distinction between the “ultimate truth” and “mundane truth” would enlighten us immediately.
5. Some practitioners, after studying Buddhism for a period of time, would probably understand it. Others, however, may still feel perplexed. This is determined by the learner’s inborn nature.
6. It is undeniable that most people in the mundane world are in pursuit of personal achievements, including wealth, health, fame, honor, and longevity. Buddhist disciples reckon that the pursuits of fame and wealth are reasonable, as long as they are not mixed with craving, aversion, and ignorance.
7. This way of thinking can clarify many misunderstandings. Buddhism never imposes transcendence upon us. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* states that “the Buddha’s teachings in this world cannot be appreciated without worldly references”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 佛法在世界，不離世間覺。(六祖壇經般若第 2 品無相頌; “Formless Verses” in chapter two of the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*.)

## Chapter 17

### Three Seals of the Dharma

The Three Seals of Dharma<sup>1</sup>, sometimes referred to as the Three Markings of Buddhism, is an important teaching in Buddhism. This concept is expounded in the *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Scripture* (Skt.: *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*).

Concretely speaking, the “three seals of the dharma” teaches us that:

- 1) all things are impermanent<sup>2</sup>;
- 2) all things lack inherent existence<sup>3</sup>;
- 3) *nirvāṇa* is perfect quiescence<sup>4</sup>.

#### 1. All things are impermanent

This dharma seal teaches us to recognize that nothing exists permanently. Nothing can be taken for granted. One man’s good luck might disappear for some unforeseeable reason. Just as an old proverb says, “The ocean will be folded and hung up to dry. All sentient beings will end up in smoke”.<sup>5</sup> Things are constantly mutating. What happened one minute ago is already history. The future will not be the same as the present.

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<sup>1</sup> 三法印.

<sup>2</sup> 諸行無常.

<sup>3</sup> 諸法無我.

<sup>4</sup> 涅槃寂靜.

<sup>5</sup> 滄海變桑田, 眾生化為塵.

Some readers may wonder: I know for sure that the sun will rise from the east tomorrow morning. How can we say there is no rule? How can we explain the constant cycle of day and night?

First of all, Buddhism believes that there exists a perfect system, which evolves based on “intrinsic nature”. “Intrinsic nature” and its accompanying system are perfect. This system runs eternally, and provides many principles and rules. Some of these rules are known to us, including the theories of motion, gravity, and relativity. It also provides the law of conditioned genesis, which indicates that “all dharmas are generated based on causes and conditions”. (See Chapter 10 for details.) This law governs the generation, annihilation, and mutation of myriad things.

Now let us come back to the day-night cycle. The fact that earth runs around the sun is determined by particular causal effects. If the “condition” disappears, dependant things would vanish accordingly. There is no need to conjecture the possible aftermath of a catastrophe on earth. As long as “conditions” still exist, things will remain the same. However, global warming is becoming an unavoidable fact. This is a warning for us.

## **2. All things lack inherent existence**

Buddhism teaches us to avoid an egocentric mindset. If we do not truly realize that nothing has a self, we would hardly prioritise the interests of others over our own. From the perspective of Buddhism, nothing we encounter is as permanent as our “intrinsic nature”. It is said that: “All dharmas are immaterial, absolutely empty, and unobtainable”. “All dharmas” refers to “conditioned phenomena”. We humans are “conditioned phenomena”. In addition to “conditioned

phenomena”, there is also “unconditioned phenomena”. This refers to the pure mind, Buddha-nature, real character of all dharmas, and emptiness of all dharmas. The Buddha points out in the *Heart Sutra* that “[all dharmas] are neither created nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, and they neither increase nor diminish”.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps because Buddhism considers that the existence of all sentient beings and everything are delusional, some authors have made this claim: “The denial of the existence of the soul makes Buddhism unique in the history of human thought”.<sup>7</sup> This viewpoint actually shakes the foundation of Buddhism. It argues that everything is gone after death; consequently, none of our behaviour would generate any effect. This view certainly contradicts the fundamental Buddhist concept of the principle of karmic retribution.

Indeed, Buddhism does not have a concept of the soul equivalent to that of Christianity. Nevertheless, we understand that when one is dead, some spiritual “state” or “medium” of the same person must receive awards and punishments according to one’s karma. Instead of using the word “soul”, this “state” or “medium” is articulated as “divine consciousness” (Skt.: *vijñānanā*) or “store consciousness” (Skt.: *ālayavijñāna*).

Is there a concept of “self” in Buddhism? While saying that all things lack self, we already accept the idea of no-self. As Section 25 of the *Diamond Sutra* has revealed, however, “ordinary

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<sup>6</sup> “不生不滅, 不垢不淨, 不增不減.”

<sup>7</sup> Walpola Rahula, *What The Buddha Taught* (London: One World Publications, 2005), 51.

people think there is a ‘self’ ”<sup>8</sup>, and accordingly consider themselves as having a real existence. By contrast, those who are enlightened know that these are all illusory.

Seen from the Buddha’s perspective, there is no distinction between “buddha” and “mundane”. Such distinction only comes from the illusion of human beings. In other words, the question of “I” is derived from the delusive conceptualization of humans. We ought to adopt the view of the enlightened in seeing things. When confronting difficulties, we should do things according to mundane truth. The matter of the utmost importance is to observe precepts, during which we have to abandon the discriminative mind, attachment, delusion, and egocentrism.

### 3. Nirvāṇa is perfect quiescence

Nirvāṇa is a state of permanence, bliss, self, and purity. When one is enlightened and impervious to afflictions, one is said to have reached nirvāṇa, in which all sufferings vanish. We shall aspire to reach the condition of nirvāṇa.

The *Nirvana Sutra* elucidates the eight wonderful things about nirvāṇa, namely, the eight flavors of nirvāṇa.<sup>9</sup>

1. nirvāṇa-permanence (the permanent existence of past, present and future, and the ten directions)
2. peace (tranquility and permanent extinction of great suffering)

<sup>8</sup> 金剛經第 25 分: “凡夫以為有我。”

<sup>9</sup> “涅槃經中涅槃八味是所謂: 1. 常住: 三際常存, 十方恒在. 2. 寂滅: 寂絕無為, 大患永滅. 3. 不老: 不遷不變, 無增無減. 4. 不死: 從本不生, 今亦無滅. 5. 清淨: 安住清淨, 諸障悉盡. 6. 虛通: 虛徹靈通, 圓融無礙. 7. 不動: 寂然不動, 妙絕無為. 8. 快樂: 無生死苦, 有真常樂, 或許我們可以把涅槃想像為天堂的幸福。”



3. no aging (eternal and immutable, no increase or decrease)
4. no death (originally un-arisen and no cessation at present)
5. purity (settling a pure mind, and freeing from obstructions)
6. unimpededness (supernormal awareness and perfect interpenetration without obstruction)
7. unperturbedness (marvelous non-action, still and unmoving)
8. joy (detachment of the suffering of birth and death, achievement of permanent bliss). Maybe we could imagine nirvāṇa as heavenly happiness.

It is noticeable that some Buddhist concepts frequently appear in different scriptures. Take the *Bodhisattva's Big Eight Appreciations Sutra* introduced in Chapter 7 for example. The teachings of this scripture resonate with those of the three seals of the dharma. The first awakening<sup>10</sup> in the scripture mentions the following:

Nothing is permanent in the world.

All political regimes are subject to fall.

All things composed of the four elements are void and contain the seeds of suffering.

The five aggregates contained in humans are without a separate self.

They always come and go.

They are empty of self, without sovereignty.

The mind is the source of all evils,

and the body is the forest of all impure actions.

If we examine these facts from this perspective,

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<sup>10</sup> 八大人覺經第一覺知: 1. 世間無常; 2. 國土危脆; 3. 四大苦空; 4. 五陰無我; 5. 生滅變異; 6. 虛偽無主; 7. 心是惡源; 8. 形為罪藪; 9. 如是觀察; 10. 漸離生死.

we can gradually detach ourselves from the cycle of birth and death.

The meaning of line one is equivalent to the teaching of the first dharma seal that whatever is phenomenal is impermanent. Line three and four imply that we must maintain a selfless attitude, which is to say that all dharmas are without self. We need to understand that our true self is the “intrinsic nature”, which does not belong to the constituent dharmas of existence. The intrinsic nature is eternal, whereas our bodies and surroundings are not. This exactly corresponds to the second dharma seal. Line ten refers to nirvāṇa, which exactly matches the third dharma seal.

The “three seals of the dharma” is a key concept in Buddhism. Every serious practitioner should know that it delivers a philosophical theory with no superstition. Beginners of Buddhism must understand all the basic ideas of Buddhism that have been discussed in Chapter 2. Then they need to understand other theories including the “three seals of the dharma”. These are supplementary materials for understanding the core value of Buddhism.

In his *Introduction to Buddhism*, the renowned scholar Zhou Shaoxian briefly outlines the concept of the “three seals of the dharma”:

“The three seals of the dharma not only interpret the Truth and common reasons. It is also taken as the path for cultivation by Buddhist practitioners. The three dharma seals are highly unanimous in revealing correct awakening. To take the path of “impermanence” is to

enter the gate of the liberation through wishlessness; the path of “absence of self” is the gate of liberation through emptiness; the path of the perfect quiescence of nirvāṇa is the gate of liberation through signlessness. Taking the three paths altogether, one observes the impermanence of the present world, becomes aware of the non-self, eliminates desires, and subsequently reaches the condition of nirvāṇa”.

Reading the above passage, we see how the three seals of the dharma perfectly articulate grand theories of Buddhism.

## Chapter 18

### The One Unity Perception

In this chapter, we begin our discussion about “the one unity perception”<sup>1</sup>, a concept that has the potential to contribute to promoting world peace.

We have seen that how the three poisons of craving, aversion, and ignorance obstruct our “intrinsic nature”, and how we can restore our “intrinsic nature” by avoiding these. We have discussed how the three poisons play a major role in generating conflict. This proposition is very simple but powerful. In effect, we can shift to another principle to demonstrate the how Buddhism has the capacity to resolve conflict.

This principle is the “unity of myriad things in the universe”. Modern science has proved that the universe has been created by the “Big Bang”, which was initiated as the “One”. Measuring the distances between planets, scientists are convinced that the universe has always been expanding. Based on scientific observations, they are able to put forward a proposition— the universe began from a single primordial particle.

The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* has shown that “intrinsic nature” can generate all phenomena, and naturally

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<sup>1</sup> 一合相. See Section 30 of the *Diamond Sutra*. Chen Yixiao in *The Dictionary of Common Buddhist Terms* (佛學常見詞匯) defines “a reified entity” as follows: “it is a perceivable matter comprised of numerous micro particles. The world as “a reified entity” consists of countless tiny particles. The human body as “a reified entity” is composed of four great elements and five aggregates.

this includes the “Big Bang”. My conjecture is that “intrinsic nature” evolves into a perfect system, in which the law of conditioned genesis triggered the “Big Bang”. Therefore, the “Big Bang” beginning from the primordial particle must depend on certain causes and conditions. If the universe began from the One, then the entire universe must have been in a state of a single primordial particle. (We have discussed the distinction between the ultimate truth and mundane truth. While studying the myriad things in the universe, “the enlightened” sees that all phenomena are illusory and unsubstantial. Those who are “the still perplexed” think that all phenomena in the universe are real and substantial, and are scattered in various places. Nevertheless, the “the still perplexed” have to accept the idea that the universe was a single particle upon explosion.)

Considering that human bodies are comprised of smaller parts, how would one part react when another is injured? Assume that one of my feet stepped on a nail, my other bodily parts would come to help immediately. For example, my hands will help pull out the nail. This manifests the “single unified body”, as my hands’ assistance would be spontaneous. If, for some reason, my tongue is accidentally bitten by my teeth, the tongue would not want to take revenge on the teeth. Likewise, Buddhist principles teach us not to seek revenge after we get hurt. This is another example of the “single body”.

When we genuinely see that our opponents belong to the same entity as we do, we will be inclined to forgiveness rather than punishment. The principle of “an eye for an eye” is not in accordance with Buddhism. If people of different regions and ethnicities are willing to accept this principle of the “single

unified body”, the world will undoubtedly become a safer place to live. This reflects the value of Buddhism in advancing world peace.

Furthermore, “the one unity perception” is also useful to explain why we extend filial piety to our parents, and why we respect our ancestors. Not only do we look upon ourselves and our contemporaries as one, we also include people living before us and those living after us as one. This approach has provided us with a good reason to respect our ancestors.

Which scripture narrates the discourse about “the one unity perception”? The answer is Section 30 of the *Diamond Sutra*. If the universe is real, then there is “one unity perception”. Buddhism enlightens us that all phenomena are illusory and unsubstantial.

However, we should also be aware that according to the *Diamond Sutra*, the one unity perception is mentioned for the benefit of those not yet enlightened. According to Section 30 of the *Diamond Sutra*, the enlightened do not touch on this issue, while the unenlightened see everything they encounter as real and substantial.

We all know the importance of environmental protection today. And yet Buddhism in 2,500 years ago has already provided us sufficient reasons to love the environment.

Both Buddhism and Christianity ask people to respect life. Article Five of the Ten Commandments says “Thou shalt not kill”. The Ten Commandments ask us not to kill humans, but do not

prevent us from killing other forms of life. I am not certain about what view Christianity holds on animals as a dietary source for human beings.

In Chapter 6, “the blessing of heaven and man”, one of the three blessings of tranquility has asked us to be compassionate and not to kill any sentient beings. Putting together the principles of “not killing” and “one unity perception”, we realize that we should refrain from killing other living things that are part of the same entity as we are.

Since we have already understood the different levels of blessings and the idea of “one unity perception”, we shall be able to comprehend the logic of the famous expression in Buddhism: “unconditional great compassion and great compassion based on sameness in essence”<sup>2</sup>.

The “unconditional great compassion” connotes a bodhisattva’s mind state while offering charity for humans. The bodhisattva’s intention is to help the beneficiaries. The take-home message is that the mind of a bodhisattva does not need any particular reason to show compassion. This seems an exception to the law of conditioned genesis expounded in Chapter 10 that everything arises for a reason. In fact, compassion itself is the reason. It is the mind of sentient beings that affects the bodhisattva and causes him to respond.

The “great compassion based on sameness in essence” illustrates that because the myriad things belong to the single entity, our perceived enemies are actually part of the same

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<sup>2</sup> 無緣大慈, 同體大悲.

entity as we are. As we have learned that we shall not harm our own body parts, we shall not perceive them as enemies anymore.



### **Guide on Exploring the Framework of Buddhism**

We have attempted to introduce the basic framework of Buddhism in Part I and II. One should realize that it takes a lot of time and effort to study Buddhism.

1. Through our study of Buddhism, we will understand our life, the environment, and the Truth of the universe. We must know that the central theme and ultimate goal of Buddhism is to teach us how to attain enlightenment, and that this is what will allow us to obtain happiness.

(Some scholars prefer to think of Buddhism as the teachings on the elimination of suffering. For the purpose of assisting beginner practitioners, it is necessary to clarify on this point. The central theme of Buddhism is about enlightenment. We will know how to remove afflictions through enlightenment. The Buddha cannot and will not directly eliminate the suffering for all sentient beings, as the Buddha-dharma is not a painkiller or an anaesthetic.)

2. To comprehend the framework of Buddhism, we must learn its core principles and concepts. These have been elucidated in Chapter 2. Buddhism also offers us a comprehensive and logical approach to guide our daily life. These details are outlined in Chapter 6.

3. In learning Buddhist theories, we will certainly encounter perspectives that are not introduced in this book. The guidance provided here will prepare us to incorporate new ideas with concepts we have become familiar with.

## Part III

### Misunderstandings about Buddhism

What is the main issue in promoting Buddhism?

Comparatively speaking, it would be rather easy to convert someone to Christianity. About sixty years ago when I was only seven, I entered a Catholic primary school. I still recall my conversation with a father. The father asked questions and I responded.

Q: Do you see the sculpture over there? Do you agree that someone needed to make it before it existed?

A: Yes. There must have been someone who made it.

Q: Seeing our earth and everything on earth, do you agree that there is a creator?

A: Yes, I agree.

Q: The creator is God. Do you agree that God is the creator of earth and everything?

A: Yes, I agree.

Q: Do you therefore believe in the existence of God and obey his orders?

A: Yes, I agree.

Through the brief dialogue, we can see how easy it is for Catholics to proselyte a young child. Buddhism, to the contrary, is quite difficult to understand, especially for children. The logic of Buddhism can be appreciated only with a mature mind.

As Tony Morris writes,<sup>1</sup> Buddhism is not anti-intellectual. To the contrary, its philosophy is exquisite and refined.” To understand Buddhism, we ought to segregate the essentials from the inessentials. In doing so, it is not difficult to obtain a breakthrough in appreciating what Buddhism teaches. (Having an understanding of Buddhism is still some way from attaining enlightenment.)

Many scholars devote their energies to studying peripheral issues of Buddhism. They engage in disputes over particular details and adamantly exert their efforts to mould different opinions. By misleading readers and distracting the writers themselves, some of these digressions could have a negative effect on Buddhist cultivation.

How should we discern what is important and what is not? Buddhism alerts us not to set “our” view against “theirs.” We should search for guidance in the classics, which offer eighty-four thousand permutations for practitioners to attain Buddhahood. If we are entangled with trivial things, the true meaning of Buddhism will be lost.

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Morris, *What Do Buddhists Believe?* (London: Granta Books, 2006), 1.

There are several factors that may cause scepticism towards Buddhism:

1. Misconceptions about Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. This will be discussed in the following chapter.
2. Lack of understanding of the various Buddhist schools. This will be discussed in Chapter 20.
3. Isolated interpretations of “emptiness,” “the four noble truths”, and “the eight correct paths” without reference to the ultimate goal of Buddhism. Unquestionably these concepts are very important, but overly emphasizing them would hinder our understanding of the overall framework of Buddhism. This will be discussed in Chapter 21.
4. A false belief about Buddhism as polytheism. This will be addressed in Chapter 22.

## Chapter 19

### Differences of Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism

When propagating the Buddha-dharma, Śākyamuni often mentioned the importance of “initiating enlightenment,” which has always been the unshakable theme in Buddhism.

According to the *Buddha Thesaurus Sutra*<sup>1</sup>, the essential distinction between Hinayana<sup>2</sup> and Mahayana<sup>3</sup> Buddhism is that the two belong to two different stages of the same cultivation. (Also see discussion on Blessing of the Big Carriage in Chapter 6).

Hinayana Buddhism is built upon high moral standards of human beings, including honoring one’s mother and father, respecting one’s teachers and elders, mercifully refraining from killing living things, and practicing the ten virtuous acts. Only after having established this foundation could we begin the Mahayana path of cultivation. The Buddha also stated that “One has to learn the Hinayana path before studying the Mahayana path. Otherwise one is not a true Buddhist disciple.”

However, this is merely one of the viewpoints addressed in the *Buddha Thesaurus Sutra*. In fact, many Southeastern countries—Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, founded

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<sup>1</sup> 佛藏經

<sup>2</sup> 小乘佛法.

<sup>3</sup> 大乘佛法.

their Buddhism on the Hinayana framework. The masters there teach Buddhism by following the Hinayana path, and their approach is supported by the local government.

Why is there a split between Hinayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism? Why are there different cultivations within Mahayana Buddhism?

After the death of the Buddha, his disciples continued to propagate Buddhism generation after generations. During this long history, variegated schools of Buddhist teaching have been established. The Buddha often said that there are eighty-four thousand permutations for one to attain enlightenment.

According to the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha mentioned that everything one encounters has the potential to provide the causes and conditions for one to obtain Buddhahood. It is not at all surprising that there are numerous sects in Buddhism, as all of them attempt to promulgate their way to Buddha-dharma. However, if someone tries to promote some cultivating methods without the foundation of Buddhism, then such a person is trying to create a new religion.

Hinayana Buddhism considers that the most important goal in life is to attain enlightenment and achieve nirvāṇa. Although its believers are encouraged to selflessly help others, self-realization is their primary goal after all. The *Āgama Sutra*<sup>4</sup> uses a phrase to describe the highest achievement of Hinayana Buddhism: “My life has come to an end. My work in inspiring

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<sup>4</sup> 阿含經.

spiritual values is established. What I set out to do is done. I have no reason to face rebirths.”<sup>5</sup>

The Hinayana teaching is mainly based on the “four noble truths” and “thirty-seven factors of enlightenment” (including “the eight correct paths”), which were proposed by the Buddha in his first sermons (the first turn of the wheel of the Dharma).

Being formulated during the Buddha’s second and three turns of the wheel of the Dharma, Mahayana Buddhism is mainly oriented towards *prajñā* and the pure mind of the *tathāgatagarbha*, considering that practitioners should establish and broaden their enlightened mind to help others. This goal is well articulated through the four great vows of the bodhisattva:

1. to save all living beings without limit;
2. to put an end to all afflictions and delusions however numerous;
3. to study and learn all methods and means;
4. to become perfect in the supreme Buddha-law.

The ultimate goal of Mahayana Buddhism is to pursue perfection until it liberates all sentient beings, which is the core of the enlightened mind.

As Buddhist believers, especially as followers of Mahayana Buddhism, how can we explain the differences between the Mahayana and Hinayana paths? We must bear in mind an

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<sup>5</sup> 我生已盡, 梵行已立, 所作已辦, 不受後有.”

undisputable fact that every path can help us acquire enlightenment, as long as it is the true Dharma. Buddhist teachings never try to argue about who is right and who is wrong.

We would not feel comfortable when we fail to help someone within our capability. This shame of selfness reveals our distance from perfection. In order to elevate ourselves to perfection, we must cultivate the enlightened mind.

How do disciples of Hinayana Buddhism see the difference between the two traditions? To understand this, Professor Huston Smith, a renowned scholar of religious studies,<sup>6</sup> has framed this question: “If people are able to completely surpass themselves, just like the arhats, what could be left besides compassion?” The answer is “nothing.” However, this question brings up another question: “If one is full of compassion after obtaining the true reward and entering nirvāṇa, then how could he stand the fact that numerous sentient beings surrounding him are still suffering from cyclic existence?” After all, the only solution to this conundrum is the four great vows of the bodhisattva and the enlightened mind.

Can we simply adopt the Mahayana path while neglecting the Hinayana cultivation? Of course not. Otherwise we would not be cultivating our mind according to certain stages, which is against the Buddha’s teaching demonstrated in the *Buddha Thesaurus Sutra*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 127.

<sup>7</sup> 佛藏經.



The development of Hinayana Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism do not obstruct each other. On the contrary, the two traditions of Buddhist theories are mutually beneficial. It is worth noting that people should keep their mind free of discrimination. Just as Section 23 of the *Diamond Sutra* says, “All dharmas are equal”<sup>8</sup>, which illustrates the equality of all dharmas.

Many scholars consider that the concept of the “four noble truths” in Hinayana Buddhism actually contains the core theme of Buddhism. The following passage will explain the reason why I agree with this argument. Even though it is true, I still believe that we should introduce to beginners the concepts of “enlightening one’s mind to one’s (buddha-) nature” and “causes and effects,” which are relatively easy to understand.

The concepts of the “four noble truths”, “enlightening one’s mind to one’s (buddha-) nature” and “causes and effects” are mutually inclusive, because:

The First Truth “suffering” and Second Truth “origination” have already explained that the afflictions in human life are caused by craving, aversion, and ignorance. The idea of “causes and effects” has been integrated in the two truths. The Third Truth, “cessation,” further illustrates that suffering can be terminated, people can escape from the six destinies, achieve nirvāṇa, and restore “intrinsic nature.” It is evident that the “four noble truths” have already made reference to the concept of

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<sup>8</sup> 金剛經第 23 分: “是法平等, 無有高下.”

“enlightening one’s mind to one’s (buddha-) nature.”

As a result, I could say that the “four noble truths” and the theme of Chapter 2 reach the same goal by different means, if not following the exact route. Understanding this is very important, because when we see the commonality between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism we can come to the conclusion that the two traditions belong to two continuous and compatible stages in Buddhism. They are definitely not two different religions.

Why am I so eager to explain the distinctions between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism? Hinayana practitioners in Southeast Asia might feel perplexed about the difference between Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. In this chapter, I discuss this issue in an effort to assist them in furthering their cultivations. In the West, people are already beginning to initiate Navayana. This is a Buddhist movement that may represent a new *yāna*, in addition to the traditionally recognized branches of Hinayana and Mahayana. If the “new *yāna*” is realized, the Buddha’s teachings would face the danger of false promulgation, which could potentially harm local audiences who are unable to hear the true Dharma.

### **Perfection in Mahayana Buddhism**

At the Catholic elementary school I attended in my youth, there was a class called “catechism.” Every student was given a brochure listed with several questions and answers, which teachers required students to memorize. For example, the first Q&A is as follows:

Q: Why do we exist in this world?

A: We are living in this world to worship God and to save our souls.

It seems that the goal of life in Christianity is to save our souls. It is rather similar to the Hinayana tradition, where the main purpose is to achieve enlightenment and nirvāṇa for ourselves. The Mahayana tradition is somewhat different. It emphasizes perfection and the enlightened mind. Besides, Mahayana Buddhism aims to help all sentient beings to attain enlightenment.

## Chapter 20

### The Arising of Various Buddhist Schools

The Buddhist schools are in most cases established by eminent monks with great virtue who discover various approaches or cultivating methods to help their disciples quickly attain enlightenment. In the second half of this chapter, I will introduce some of the schools and their histories of establishment.

Why are there so many different schools? I would like to make several conjectures about this phenomenon and list them here. Readers could have your own opinions too.

1. In principle, Buddhism does not approve the idea of adhering to one opinion. This attitude creates free space for interpretations of Buddhist theories. Everyone can help investigate Buddhist philosophy with an open mind. This avoids sectarian conflicts in the long run.
2. Since ancient times, China has never had an authoritarian agency to centralize the control of Buddhist ideology. Meanwhile, Buddhist principles never consider one type of ideology superior to another.
3. There is no central institute to govern and supervise activities and cultivations of Buddhism.

4. Charismatic Buddhist leaders usually expect to reach consensus through establishing their own schools. There are other incentives for founding a new school. For instance, setting up a new school would help leaders maintain independence while developing a benign relationship with a particular government.
5. Chapter 6 has mentioned the three treasures of Buddhism—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the saṃgha. In effect, it is the underlying qualities that are cherished by Buddhism. A new religious sect may take a fresh perspective to understanding such values and provide itself a theoretical foundation to support their fresh perspective.
6. This situation is rather similar to learning martial arts. A kung fu practitioner may study judo, taekwondo, taichi, wing chun, aikido and many other kinds of martial arts. The ultimate goal for one to learn martial arts is to have the ability to protect oneself and beat opponents during fights. The ultimate purpose of following any one of the Buddhist schools is to learn how to attain enlightenment. In other words, all the seemingly distinctive schools share a common goal, despite their having adopted variegated approaches.

The schools of Buddhism can be categorized into three types:

### **Type 1: sudden cultivation**

This approach teaches students the ways to attain enlightenment immediately. For example, one could achieve a real breakthrough straightaway rather than cultivating through

a gradual process. (A breakthrough is not exactly equivalent to enlightenment. This is because one could quickly advance in understanding Buddhist theories but still might not be able to attain enlightenment due to certain attachment to the mundane world.)

### **Type 2: gradual cultivation**

In this type of cultivation, through the gradual learning of precepts and classics, one will steadily obtain a correct understanding of Buddhism and finally make a breakthrough.

### **Type 3: purified cultivation**

Schools that teach this type of cultivation focus on purity and tranquility, which are the two essential factors for us to make breakthroughs.

When we begin to study Buddhist principles, we could accept any school's approach. After learning all the contents taught by different schools, you will realize that their differences are minimal, as all of them share the identical goal of restoring the student's "intrinsic nature."

Among the seven famous Buddhist schools, there is one school of sudden cultivation (the Chan School), two schools of purified cultivation (the Pure Land School and Esoteric Buddhism), and four schools of gradual cultivation (the Lotus Sutra school, the Tiantai School, the Flower Ornament School, and the Three Treatise school). Although these schools belong to different types of cultivation, they all engage in the same issue of Buddhism.

## **The First Sect - The Tiantai School**

Now I am going to explain the process of establishing a typical school. Let us imagine ourselves as someone living in imperial China over 1,400 years ago. At the time, anyone who wanted to promulgate a certain religion must first get permission from the emperor. After being granted authority, one would want to keep a distance from other cultivators in order to ensure one's own status. The most efficient way to do so would have been to establish a school and build a harmonious relationship with the political ruler. It would be ideal if the school could offer some unique interpretations of Buddhist philosophy.

When establishing the Tiantai School, the first systematic school of Buddhist thought in China, what the founder did exactly matches the process described above.

During the reign of Emperor Wu of Zhou (560-578), many Buddhist cultivators become extremely immoral and corrupt. Having decided not to tolerate this anymore, Emperor gave orders to close all the monasteries and confiscated their properties. After the death of Emperor Wu, a renowned scholar Zhiyi (538-597) seized the opportunity to restore Buddhism through developing a new Buddhist theory, which proposes that “phenomena are no different from reality.”<sup>1</sup> In promulgating Buddhism, Zhiyi introduced new rules and methods of his teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> This indicates that the truth of any theory must be tested with respect to its application to contemporary practices.

The founder of the Tiantai School built a close relationship with the supreme ruler and consolidated his school in China.

### **Esoteric Buddhism**

The Esoteric School was established by three eminent monks: Śubhakarasiṃha (637-735), Vajrabodhi (669-741), Amoghavajra (705-774), who introduced new concepts of cultivation while maintaining the core theme of Buddhism. It is said that the first esoteric temple in China is the Great Xingshan Monastery in Shaanxi province. Different schools usually base their studies on different Buddhist sutras. The primary classic of the Esoteric School is the *Mahavairocana Tantra*.

What is even more interesting is the fact that the Esoteric School is divided into five branches—the Nyingma School, the Gelug School, the Kagyu School, the Sakya School, and the Black School—which all share the same core principles. For instance, the Black School offers the so-called cultivating method of “a cicada sloughing off its skin” in order to return to one’s true nature. This method exactly corresponds to the restoration of “intrinsic nature.”

### **The Flower Ornament School**

The Flower Ornament School has made significant contributions to Buddhist philosophy and Mahayana Buddhism in China. This school’s teachings and theories are based on the *Flower Ornament Sutra*. The core concept in this school is conventionally epitomized in two key phrases: the “dependent



arising from the Dharma-realm”<sup>2</sup> and “perfect interpenetration without obstruction.”<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of the first key phrase is identical to a concept in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* that the “intrinsic nature” could create myriad dharmas. The second key phrase illustrates that the Buddhist ideas among various schools are compatible.

The Flower Ornament School considers that “one is all and all is one.” This is a concept that can be puzzling for beginners. It can be explained as follows: before attaining enlightenment, everyone considers what they see with their eyes as reality, including birth, aging, sickness, and death, separation between loved ones in life or death, fame and wealth. Buddhism considers that this mindset runs counter to the Buddha’s teaching. For example, the *Diamond Sutra* says, “All conditioned phenomena are just like an illusion, a bubble, a shadow.” Since all conditioned phenomena are like a bubble and a shadow, they are not different in essence. The concept of “one is all and all is one” from the *Flower Ornament Sutra* is fundamentally identical to the idea of “one truth is all truth” in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. As long as one obtains thusness, one is able to realize all dharmas.

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<sup>2</sup> Dharma-realm = “one true realm of reality” = “pure mind of the tathāgatagarbha” = “intrinsic nature.” (法界緣起)

<sup>3</sup> “Perfect interpenetration without obstruction” = “perfection without fault, integration of everything.” (圓融無礙)

## **The Chan School**

Among all the Buddhist schools, the Chan School is the most popular and sinicized in China. People are mostly familiar with Huineng the Sixth Patriarch, whose teachings are systematically recorded in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. The Chan School takes “idealessness” as its object, “formlessness” as its basis, and “non-attachment” as its fundamental principle.

“Idealessness” does not mean to stop thinking and reject all ideas. Rather it means to eliminate deluded and distracting thoughts. “Formlessness” reminds us to realize the illusory nature of the myriad perceptual forms and maintain an unlimited and pure “intrinsic nature.” “Non-attachment” asks us not to cling to external objects and not to be defiled by mundane forms, sounds, and tastes. Realizing “idealessness,” “formlessness,” and “non-attachment” is the fundamental principle of the Chan approach. Through fulfilling the above requirements, one could eliminate afflictions, transcend the mundane world, and penetrate all dharmas without hindrance. One’s spirit will thus be liberated, and one’s heart will obtain the supreme wisdom. This is the ideal human condition in Chan Buddhism.

## **Pure Land School**

The Pure Land School is also very popular in Chinese societies, domestic and abroad. The features of this School can be summarized as follows:

1. This school relies on the noted “five classics and one treatise” to teach its students.

2. Maintaining a pure condition of mind is of the utmost importance. This school advocates verbal chanting of the Buddha's name as the cultivating method.
3. Its practitioners recognize the necessity of their rebirth in the realm of ultimate bliss.
4. Faith, aspiration, and practice are the recommended methods of cultivation. "Faith" involves believing in oneself, others, causes and effects, phenomena, and principles. To have faith in oneself is to be self-confident, (as "intrinsic nature" is not different from Buddha-nature). To have faith in others is to believe in the Buddha's teaching. Having faith in causes and effects is to believe in one's own capability of analyzing causes and effects. Chanting the Buddha's name is the cause, while realizing Buddhahood is the fruit. Having faith in phenomena and principles is to believe that chanting the Buddha's name could help one to reborn in another world. Therefore, we ought to concentrate on cultivating our rebirth in another world and vow to return to save all sentient beings. Practice means to constantly chant the Buddha's name. This eliminates evil and cultivates benevolence.

### **Facing Different Views**

We should not be surprised to see the emergence of other new schools in the future, for this condition is understandable, as long as the core principle of Buddhism does not change.

You might ask: which school should I join? There is no single answer. As long as a school provides you with effective

cultivating methods to understand Buddhism, the school is a suitable match.

Since new students of Buddhism do not need to have a deep understanding of a certain school's particular theories, here I have only provided some general introductions to these schools. If a believer, after having studied Buddhism in a certain school, finds that some ideologies and cultivating methods are not acceptable to him, is he obliged to follow this school regardless of his own feeling? Or could he hold a dissenting opinion? In the previous chapters I have talked about the tolerance Buddhism has towards accommodating various views. Students are therefore free to choose whatever school that suits them. I mention this point because the approach of karmamudrā (a Vajrayana Buddhist technique of sexual practice with a physical or visualized consort) might come to my mind. For obvious reasons, many people would find this practice unacceptable.

After understanding basic concepts of Buddhism, readers will understand the reason why different schools must respect each other. The very first lesson we learn from Buddhism is to avoid delusion, discrimination, and attachment. Each school takes its own approach to cultivation. No one is authorized to judge which school is right or wrong. Nonetheless, when you see things go awry, you need to express your criticism.

## Chapter 21

### Missing the Key Concepts of Buddhism

The author has explained the two core principles of Buddhism in Chapter 2:

1. To know the truth of the universe and human life by eliminating delusion, discrimination, and attachment.
2. To deeply believe in the rule of cause and consequence.

In Hong Kong, where the majority of the population is Chinese, people enjoy religious freedom. Many like to consider themselves Buddhists. Most of them may have never participated in any admitting ceremony, which would be similar to Catholic baptism. If asked what Buddhism is, most people would give their honest answer: “I don’t know.” Some people would say something like: “I would like to receive the Heaven’s blessing.” Or others would respond with “you reap what you sow.” Although the last answer points to the correct direction, it is hardly satisfying. The fact is that offering a simple answer is not easy at all.

Where is Buddhism taking us? What is our destination? What should we do in order to reach the goal? Without answering these questions, we cannot clearly explain what Buddhism is. Without finding the central theme of Buddhism, people will still misunderstand the value of Buddhism. In such occasions, even if we understand a few Buddhist theories, we would not see the true fascination of Buddhism.

Those who are unfamiliar with Buddhist concepts would likely have a lot of questions in their minds. Below I am listing some of the key questions that might arise in helping readers to understand the framework of Buddhism and offer my answers.

**1) What is the fundamental principle of Buddhism? (What is the most important element in Buddhist teachings?) What is the implication of enlightenment? Is believing in cyclic rebirth significant?**

Chapter 2 has already provided answers to these questions. Principally speaking, Buddhist disciples believe in cyclic rebirth and unavoidable causes and consequences.

Another fundamental concept is for one to achieve Buddhahood, which is to restore one's "intrinsic nature." These are the fundamental aspects of Buddhism. If one does not recognize them, one can hardly claim that he understands Buddhism. Some writer once wrote that "Buddhists themselves can hardly reach any consensus over basic religious theories." I cannot agree with this author.

For those can have an appreciation of Chinese culture from reading Chinese texts, it can be easily observed that there are common themes running through Buddhism and Daoism, another Chinese religion. Not only are there voluminous texts on Buddhism, the same is true for Taoism. For example, a book on Taoism states that two aspects of Buddhism - "causation and consequence" and "enlightening one's mind to see one's (buddha-) nature" are incorporated

into formulating Daoism concepts. (These two concepts have been discussed in Chapter 2). The significance of this is that these two concepts are acknowledged by both Buddhist and Taoist believers.

**2) What is Hinayana Buddhism comprised of? What about Mahayana Buddhism? What are the differences between these two traditions?**

We need to know the two Buddhist themes addressed in Chapter 2, in order to recognize the differences and similarities between Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism (see Chapter 19). As has been pointed above, the *Buddha Thesaurus Sutra* provides a lucid explanation of this point.

**3) Why are there various schools in Buddhism? Why can they coexist?**

A basic teaching of Buddhism is to be tolerant of different views. This attitude allows practitioners to adopt different interpretations towards Buddhism. The up side of this view is to avoid conflicts and to maintain peaceful relations among Buddhists. The down side is that practitioners must always keep in mind the major focuses of Buddhism, otherwise they would be in danger of going onto a road that deviates from the original path built by the founders of Buddhism. Chapter 20 has examined the reasons behind the origins of a variety of schools.

**4) When we are not clear about the fundamental principles of Buddhism, can we say that there are several different kinds of Buddhism, and focus on their cultivating methods instead of searching for a universal prerequisite?**

Actually the basic principles of Buddhism are quite clear. Those are the keynotes that should be recognized by disciples. We could see that all the schools respect these key aspects.

If any scholar of religious studies claims to propose some new concepts and expects to build a new religion, he has the right to do so. However, if he does not embrace any fundamental theory of Buddhism, what he does is not relevant to Buddhism. But if he would like to establish a new school within Buddhism, then his theory must be in accordance with the central themes of Buddhism, which have been articulated in Chapter 2. The basic Buddhist principles are so intelligible that we have no reason to think that there are multiple versions of Buddhism.

When it comes to cultivating methods, each school has its own way. No school can claim that its route is the single right answer. Such a claim would be against the principles of Buddhism.



- 5) Some analysts say that Buddhist disciples are not primarily concerned about the concepts of “faith” and “liberation,” for they are more interested in questions such as “what am I?”, “How is this done correctly?”. Is this true?**

The principles of Buddhism are indeed practical. And yet, faith is another necessary factor. Buddhists must believe in “intrinsic nature,” which is identical to Buddha-nature. They should also believe in the unavoidable relation between causes and consequences. It is worth noting that one does not have to comprehend the “four noble truths” and “eight correct paths” in order to claim one’s familiarity with Buddhism, even though many books written in foreign languages emphasize on the point.

- 6) Since the establishment of Buddhism by Śākyamuni, what changes have been made?**

From its inauguration to this day, the core principles of Buddhism have never altered, irrespective of whether it is Mahayana or Hinayana Buddhism, both of which have been referred to in the early scriptures.

We now know that earth formed about 4.54 billion years ago, whereas the earliest humans did not exist until 3.50 million years ago. If a religious principle is accepted as having universal Truth, then its authenticity must hold for all times. The concept of cyclic rebirth is applicable to all humans and other sentient beings, and it has constantly governed the universe during the 4.54 billion years.

According to Buddhist principles, cyclic rebirth has always been effective.

**7) What prerequisites are needed to become a Buddhist disciple? How can one be qualified as a Buddhist disciple?**

Anyone who comprehends and accepts the basic principles of Buddhism can be called a Buddhist. This does not require one to attend any formal ceremony, although participating in the ritual of formally joining Buddhism (see Chapter 6 for details) could be a choice. If one changes his mind, a person could claim not to be a Buddhist. There would not be any punishment or obstacle, but absolute freedom. Renouncing one's belief in Buddhism will not put one under pressure.

People who do not believe in Buddhism will not receive any discrimination in Buddhist communities. For those who marry Buddhists, they have complete freedom to decide whether or not to follow their spouses' belief. From the Buddhist point of view, it looks perfectly normal to have a family that consists of individuals with different religious beliefs.

**8) What should Buddhist disciples bear in mind in their speech and behavior?**

This book has made earlier reference to this point. First of all, Buddhist followers should understand the gist of Buddhism. Maybe they have had some vague impressions of

Buddhism, but as long as their thoughts are in line with the general gist, they are walking on the correct path. Moreover, they should take a right attitude towards their behaviour. Some scholars, especially followers of Hinayana Buddhism, accentuate the “four noble truths” and “eight correct paths” as the key to the right attitude. The right attitude could be also referred to truthfulness, purity, equality, the right understanding, and compassion.

Moreover, it is important that we could see through the essence of things, give up our rights, and enjoy the bliss that comes with the process of casting off attachment. We must not desire unattainable things. We must remember the teachings of Buddha. Detailed explanations of these ideas are provided in Chapter 6.

### **9) Should Buddhist disciples apply what they learn to daily life?**

To practice what we have learned is very important. Buddhist principles could perfectly guide our daily behaviours. In this regard, we have tried to offer some concrete advice for readers through examples (see Chapter 13 and the second half of Chapter 6).

**10) What is the meaning of Buddhism? How could Buddhism change our way of life?**

This is a very important issue. Buddhist learners will not miss this after studying the gist of Buddhism. If you still feel confused after reading this book, I suggest you read it again.

**11) What are the differences between Buddhism and Christianity?**

According to Buddhism, one should “enlighten one’s mind to see one’s (buddha-) nature.” Christianity says we ought to “know the lord.” Both are eternal. It is impossible to judge who is right and who is wrong with a discriminating mind, as such effort will prove to be futile.

## Chapter 22

### The Misconception of Buddhism as Polytheism

Upon seeing dazzling sculptures inside Buddhist monasteries, people who are not familiar with Buddhism might immediately have the impression that this religion is polytheistic. In this chapter, I need to clarify that Buddhism is NOT polytheistic.

First, let us examine the common facilities we see in a Buddhist monastery. Upon entering a temple, we see the Hall of the Guardian Kings, who are commonly known as the dharma-protecting deities. At the centre of the hall sits the smiling Maitreya Bodhisattva<sup>1</sup> facing the front door. This smile indicates that one shall treat others with joy when one is learning Buddhism. Maitreya Bodhisattva has a mountainous belly, which represents tolerance, impartiality, forgiveness. One becomes a true Buddhist disciple only after having these virtues.

Alongside Maitreya Bodhisattva stands the four celestial kings of the four directions. In the east is Dhṛtarāṣṭra<sup>2</sup> (Eastern Dharma Protector), who represents responsibility and safeguards the territory, which means that people should be responsible for themselves in domestic affairs and state affairs. How should one fulfill the responsibility of hosting state affairs?

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<sup>1</sup> 彌勒菩薩.

<sup>2</sup> 東方持國天王.

One has to be conscientious and endeavour to protect the rights of the people under his reign. Interestingly, the East Dharma Protector holds a lute in his hands. This teaches us to keep in mind that we need to find a middle path in doing things, as if we are maintaining equilibrium in plucking the strings. Buddhist dharma teaches us that we should be neither excessive nor insufficient. We should maintain the middle way in order to be perfect.

In the south is Virūḍhaka<sup>3</sup> (Southern Dharma Protector), who teaches us not only to complete our own duties, but to make progress every day, as we must forge ahead or be swept downstream. Virūḍhaka holds a sword that represents wisdom. It means to cut off afflictions.

In the west is Virūpākṣa<sup>4</sup> (Western Dharma Protector), who teaches us to open our eyes and see the world around us. A dragon, sometimes a serpent coils around his body. The dragon is known for its flexibility in the constantly changing conditions. It means that what we see are constantly evolving, and we ought to know how to deal with these changes.

In the north is Vaiśravaṇa<sup>5</sup> (Northern Dharma Protector), who teaches us to listen. We notice that he holds an umbrella. This reminds us to avoid outside pollutions to our pure minds.

Next I will explain the sculptures in the main hall - Treasured Hall of Great Heroes. The sculptures at the centre are a buddha

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<sup>3</sup> 南方增長天王.

<sup>4</sup> 西方廣目天王.

<sup>5</sup> 北方多聞天王.

and two bodhisattvas. This is always the case. “One” represents the master and “two” represents the followers.

“Buddha” refers to the thusness of humans, which is also called Buddha-nature. Buddha is a Sanskrit word that connotes the person who has awakened to the true nature of existence. Bodhisattva is the Sanskrit term for anyone who has awakened but is still attached to delusion. Although a bodhisattva has not reached Buddhahood, he has generated bodhicitta ("enlightenment-mind"), a spontaneous aspiration to enlighten all sentient beings. Thus, buddhas and bodhisattvas represent different levels of cultivation.

There are four bodhisattvas teaching us Buddhism. They are:

1. Earth-Store Bodhisattva who teaches us filial piety;
2. Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva who teaches us compassion;
3. Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva who teaches us wisdom;
4. Samantabhadra Bodhisattva who teaches us practice, which is to apply filial piety, compassion, and intelligence in our daily lives.

We make obeisance to these figures, in which the virtues we revere are embodied. We visualize these figures in order to reveal their benevolence. This is not polytheism. The entire Buddha-dharma is comprised of filial piety, compassion, wisdom, and practice.

In some temples, people may see some idols that are not relevant to Buddhism. For example, the Empress of Heaven, Grand Supreme Elderly Lord, Divus Guan, and Jade Emperor are worshipped in Daoism but not in Buddhism. It is therefore

understandable for some Western scholars to mistake Buddhism as Polytheism by seeing the worshipping of these irrelevant idols.

Throughout its long history, Chinese culture believes that every person's soul exists after his death, which is called the "soul in Heaven." As I have mentioned, Chinese culture emphasizes the importance of filial piety. In keeping with this emphasis, many Chinese might carve out a niche or simply install a framed photo of their late parents at home, as a way to show our reverence for ancestors. They may even regularly offer incense to them. And yet we would not consider this custom polytheistic.

Sometimes, people go to monasteries to seek blessings from the buddhas and bodhisattvas. This is undeniably true. But, once again, the use of the titles "buddha" and "bodhisattva" are merely for the convenience of describing certain virtues. We need to always remember that all the buddhas and bodhisattvas have formulated the perfect qualities. Hence, we are taught that "all buddhas are like one." They all belong to "One True Realm of Reality".<sup>6</sup> No one is superior to anyone else. And no one discriminates against another in this realm.

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<sup>6</sup> The *Dictionary of Common Buddhist Terms* (佛學常見詞匯); page 6 edited by the householder Chen Yixiao explains that the one true realm of reality is "the dharmakāya, or spiritual body of all Buddhas, eternal, above terms of being, indefinable, neither immanent nor transcendent, yet the one reality, though beyond thought." He continues to state, "the one true realm refers to the absolute truth. Both the 'one true realm of reality' in the Flower Ornament School and the 'real character of all dharmas' in the Tiantai School talk about the intrinsic nature from the standpoint of thusness. In other words, the reality and immutability of all dharmas are thusness. Therefore, it is said that when one truth is understood, all truths will be understood.



## One True Realm of Reality<sup>7</sup>

This is a concept in Buddhism. This concept is related to intrinsic nature, and perfection.

1. “Intrinsic nature” is an inherent quality of all matters (including humans).
2. “Intrinsic nature” possesses immeasurable virtues, marks, and wisdom.
3. We do not see our intrinsic nature due to our own faults and errors. According to Śākyamuni Buddha, faults and errors include delusion, discrimination, and attachment, which obstruct our “intrinsic nature.”

4. Below is the enlightening discussion on “intrinsic nature” in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* by the famed master Huineng:

Who would have thought that the intrinsic nature is pure by itself?

Who would have thought that the intrinsic nature is intrinsically free from arising and ceasing?

Who would have thought that the intrinsic nature is fully replete?

Who would have thought that the intrinsic nature is unmoving?

Who would have thought that the intrinsic nature is capable of engendering all phenomena?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 一真法界.

<sup>8</sup> 何期自性，本自清淨；何期自性，本不生滅；何期自性，本自具足；何期自性，本無動搖；何期自性，能生萬法.

5. With a true understanding of the intrinsic nature, people will realize that it is able to engender all phenomena (rather than creating myriad things), which includes the system of completeness in Chapter 1. The myriad things in the Universe are also reflections of the intrinsic nature.
6. If the “intrinsic nature”, being perfect, has created the myriad things, then the generated things are as complete as the intrinsic nature. The completeness must be seen as “one” but not “two.” The logical reasoning is as follows: If we say that a beautiful person paints a beautiful painting, the standards of beauty must vary in different contexts and thus cannot be viewed as “one”. Two things may be appreciated as beautiful for two varied reasons. But if something is perfect, then there is only one form of perfection, which nevertheless can be manifested through different forms. The “One True Realm of Reality” exactly describes the perfection, sometimes called “the great perfection”<sup>9</sup>, is represented in various forms. The perfection of intrinsic nature and that of the Buddha-nature is fundamentally identical, which is one rather than two.
7. An enlightened person attains the Buddhahood. We revere and worship the benevolence of buddhas. There is no difference for us to worship Buddha A or Buddha B, or Avalokitêśvara Bodhisattva, because the perfection in the One True Realm of Reality is one and the same.

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<sup>9</sup> 大圓滿.

As is mentioned above, those who are salvaged from delusion, discrimination, and attachment actually obtains the Buddhahood; in other words, he or she will become the real buddhas by restoring their intrinsic nature.

The process of becoming a bodhisattva is basically the same, expect that the buddhas have attained perfection in enlightening themselves and others, while the bodhisattvas are those who delay nirvana out of compassion in order to save all the suffering beings.

Because a great number of people seek help from the buddhas for worldly wealth, it is necessary to explain the origin of the God of Prosperity (Fan Li). Fan Li, who lived in the Warring States period, was capable of making money. Not long after amassing a huge amount of fortune, Fan donated his wealth to those who needed help and turned to penniless himself. During his lifetime, he succeeded in amassing and spending his fortune three times. After his death, people began worshipping him as the God of Prosperity and begging for his help when they expect to earn money. There are other gods of prosperity with other titles. This is the reason why there are many gods of prosperity. Each title represents the perfection of enlightenment and practice of the buddhas we worship.

Let us review the ways in which people worship the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

1. The idols we worship in monasteries and homes are symbols of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. We revere their moral conducts and altruistic spirit.

2. Neither buddha nor bodhisattva should be seen as the Christian God. Both represent perfection.
3. The One True Realm of Reality explains the perfect realm of the enlightened buddha. Perfection is One, and therefore cannot be categorized as polytheism.
4. Buddhism encourages its disciples to become buddhas and bodhisattvas. According to Buddhism, the proper vows made by its disciples will certainly be answered. Accordingly, it is thus said that the mind of faith of sentient beings affects the buddhas and bodhisattvas and causes them to respond. Occasionally we hear some believers say that some temple's buddha, for instance, the Phra Phrom is so efficacious. Does this belief imply the differentiation of the power of the Dharma between different buddhas? The fact is, a sincere mind leads to efficacy, according to Buddhist teachings. So do other religions.

Reading through Buddhist classics, we know that Buddhism has adopted the concept of "one true realm of reality" since its inception. The *Flower Ornament Sutra* offers particularly detailed accounts of this concept. Those who are able to read the Chinese Buddhist sutras could directly receive the teachings of the Buddha. Students who learn from English textbooks of Buddhism seemingly lack this extraordinary causation.

Some Western scholars consider that Buddhism is based on idolatry. It is true that there are Buddhist sculptures, as the

Tathāgata Buddha himself has thirty-two distinctive bodily characteristics to enlighten people. However, anyone who is familiar with Buddhism knows the saying in Section 26 of the *Diamond Sutra* that “The Tathāgata Buddha cannot be seen by virtue of the possession of the thirty-two distinctive features,” and the saying that “Whoever saw me [the Tathāgata Buddha] through my physical form, whoever followed me through the sound of my voice, engaged in the wrong endeavours, those people will not see me.” This revelation has expounded on idolatry and relevant theories.

Since we cannot follow the Buddha through his physical form and sound of his voice, why do monasteries install Buddhist sculptures for people to worship? To answer this question, we could quote the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* that “the Buddha’s teachings in this world cannot be appreciated without worldly references”.<sup>10</sup>

For ordinary people, worshipping the idol is their only way to show reverence for buddhas and admiration for their benevolence. As a result, this guidance towards benevolence has its own value. When we see sacrificial offerings in Buddhist monasteries, we should understand their meanings, which will enlighten our own cultivation.

When we see a glass of water in front of a Buddha’s statue, we should know that water signifies purity. It reminds us to keep our mind as pure and clear as water. Buddhists consider that water inside a glass will not wave. We should keep our minds as

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<sup>10</sup> 佛法在世間，不離世間覺。

calm as water inside a glass.

We offer flowers and fruits to buddhas. Flowers represent causes, and fruits represent effects. Buddhism teaches us to remember that cause and consequence are unavoidable. Lighting a candle in front of a statue of the Buddha symbolizes wisdom and radiance. The burning candle represents the act of “burning ourselves to illuminate others.”

Through the above interpretation, the author hopes to convey to why Buddhism is not polytheism. We know that the myriad things are one, and our worship of ancestors express our filial piety. When one sets up a good model, one’s spirit deserves our respect. If one attains Buddhahood, we should revere it. We pray to Buddhahood when we feel the need to do so.

Our relationship with buddhas and bodhisattvas is comparable to our relationship with our classmates. At school, those who successfully completed coursework will advance to the next higher grade until graduation. The highest grade is Buddhahood, which is comparable to a doctoral degree in the mundane system of education. The status of bodhisattva is equivalent to a master’s degree. The senior students and graduates at school could help us, but they have no right to condemn or send us to Hell. If one has to go to Hell, it is because of one’s own deeds. Likewise, if one has done enough good deeds, one could obtain a seat in the Western paradise. Buddhas and bodhisattvas do not have the power to decide the destination one will receive at death. I hope this explanation will dispel any polytheistic mists that prevent anyone from seeing what Buddhism really is.

## **How can Buddhism help understand the truth of the universe and life?**

Since we have studied the core ideas of Buddhism (see Chapter 2 for a detailed interpretation), and have understood that “intrinsic nature” generates myriad dharmas (see Chapter 22 for details) and the law of conditioned genesis, we can integrate these theories to produce an interpretation of the universe and the myriad things in it.

First of all, the “intrinsic nature” is perfect. It therefore brings about a perfect system, in which things evolve. The myriad things are generated in accordance with the law of conditioned genesis. Everything that happens, happens as a result of something.

If the universe has experienced the Big Crunch and subsequently the Big Bang, then the two phenomena must have their own causes. The law of conditioned genesis again allowed the Big Bang to create all the planets in the universe. Since then, this law has been constantly governing the universe. We believe that causation and cyclic rebirth is behind the arising and disappearance of different species. Cyclic rebirth had occurred to other sentient beings prior to the emergence of human life. The principle of cyclic rebirth is and will be applicable in the future. Even if humans become extinct one day, this principle would still pertain to other sentient beings.

Through analyzing the Buddhist view of myriad things, we could understand why we are here and how the universe has evolved to be as it is.

## Part IV

### **The Relationship between Religion and Modern Society and Looking Ahead**

The relationship between religion and modern society involves examining the possible influences religion might have on society. There are two possibilities.

The first possibility is that the conditions of religion and society would remain the same. Dissension would continue and even escalate to more dangerous situations.

The second possibility is that a structural transformation would occur. All the religions would have positive influences on society. This would build a harmonious and stable world.

This book explores how to eliminate the discriminative mind that separates religions and divides peoples. The ability to affect this will allow us to move forward to seek the Truth. If we can maintain this mindset, we will be able to broaden our outlook and ensure the optimistic and active influences brought by religion.



## Chapter 23

### How Can Buddhist Theories Engage Modern Life?

Different religions influence social development to varying degrees. No matter what theory a religion proposes, its acceptance in society is of utmost importance. For instance, all the monotheistic religions maintain a belief in the one and only creator. Acceptance of monotheistic religions depends on the existence of the creator.

As previous chapters of this book have argued, Buddhism does not have the concept of the so-called creator. What type of society would be open to this view? Next, I will provide some examples to illustrate the application of Buddhist thinkings in our daily lives, to reflect the social acceptance of Buddhism.

#### 1) The Significance of Filial Piety

Buddhist theories place heavy emphasis on the virtue of filial piety. Since ancient times, Confucian philosophy has also reiterated that filial piety is the most important of all virtues. (Refer to discussion in Chapter 6 on the importance of filial piety for details.)

In the Contemplation Sutra, the Buddha teaches us the “three kinds of meritorious behaviour.” The meritorious behaviour of the paths of humans and gods asks us to fulfill obligations and responsibilities such as “supporting and

taking care of our parents,” “paying attention to our teachers,” “remaining compassionate and refraining from killing any humans or animals,” and “cultivating the ten kinds of benevolent behaviours.” In this regard, both Confucians and Buddhists in traditional Chinese culture share the same stresses.

## **2) The Significance of the “Four Noble Truths”**

This concept is very important in Buddhism. By explaining the link between suffering, origination, cessation, and the path, the “four noble truths” are capable of solving international disputes and conflicts. This can be seen as a panacea for solving worldly problems. (See the second half of Chapter 8 for details.)

## **3) The Significance of Observing Precepts and Keeping the Law**

One needs to inquire about local regulations upon entering a new territory anywhere in the world. It is often said that a country has its laws and a family its rules. No religion can ignore the local legislations and rules in the name of sanctity. Buddhism takes this very seriously.

## **4) Giving away, Public Welfare, and Serving the People**

In mainland China, the government constantly reminds workers to “serve the people.” Buddhist discourse talks a lot about “giving away,” which is much broader than financial donation. The essence of giving away is to serve the people.

**5) No Superstition, Idolatry, and Contemplation of the Thirty-Two Distinctive Bodily Characteristics of a Buddha**

Many consider chanting the Buddha's name and burning incense superstitious behaviours. Chapter 22 has already addressed this issue. The Diamond Sutra states that "Whoever saw me through my physical form, whoever followed me through the sound of my voice, engaged in the wrong endeavours, those people will not see me." Nevertheless, some people feel the need to erect statues of the Buddha statue to worship. This is understandable. This could be seen as "mundane enlightenment." According to the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, "The Buddha's teachings are in the mundane world; one can achieve enlightenment only in the world."

**6) Does the Buddha offer any teaching to insatiable disciples who seek to garner money through worship?**

The Third Appreciation of the Sutra on the Eight Kinds of Attentiveness of Great Persons provides a clear response: "If we have no limit in our desire, and keep on seeking material wealth and glory, we will aggravate our sinful karma. Bodhisattva cannot approve. Always feel satisfied with what you have. Be content in poverty and mindful of the dharma teaching. Exercise wisdom in handling your affairs." <sup>1</sup>

Insatiable pursuit of wealth and fame usually aggravates our sinful karma. Only when we understand the Truth and change delusion into awakening, can we gain the wisdom that we long for.

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<sup>1</sup> 八大人覺經第三覺知: "心無厭足, 唯得多求, 增長罪惡, 菩薩不爾, 常念知足, 安貧守道, 唯慧是業。"

**7) When facing the ups and downs of life, for example, encountering a business tycoon, how should a Buddhist react?**

In real life, we are always dealing with realized stages of wealth, health, longevity, and family conditions. Some of us are very lucky to have everything going smoothly in our lives; for others, life is full of setbacks and frustrations. If we do not know how to apply the Buddhist principle of causes and effects, we would think that the world is so unfair. Fortunately, the law of cause and effect in the past, present, and future provides a perfect interpretation of our encounters in life.

**8) Stories of Miraculous Blessings**

Occasionally, we hear that some people feel so lucky to have received the Buddha's protection and a bodhisattva's spiritual manifestation that has cured their chronic diseases. We hear similar stories from followers of other religions as well. For example, some Christian patients have reported that their recurring illness suddenly disappeared after pious prayers to Jesus Christ. Even their doctors were bewildered.

Different religions respond variously to these cases. Buddhists know that we shall not judge who is right and who is wrong. We shall not debate about the possibility of miracles. When we hear believers of another religion say that contrition and prayer generate benefits, we should not feel jealous or doubtful. Rather, we should recognize the merit of rejoicing in the progress of others in Buddhism. When everyone feels joyful for others, believers of various

religions will increase mutual respect rather than mutual antagonism. This will surely help formulating a harmonious society and promoting world peace.

The enumerated examples of daily life demonstrate the Buddhist answer to dealing with the ups and downs of life, which is to maintain balance. When we contemplate the different categories of everyday life with reference to Buddhism, we know that everything could be reasonably explained.

## Chapter 24

### Outlook for Future

#### Religion and Science

Some scholars suggest that religious beliefs are on the wane. This observation is partially attested by the decreasing number of people attending churches. These scholars manifest that religions are being secularized. Many believe that the decline of religion is unavoidable, because humans are losing interest in religion during this stage of human history. Conversely, several scholars consider this decline good news. In their view, the relinquishment of religion will lead people to abandon primitive beliefs and customs and to embrace more advanced beliefs and customs.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 1, the author prompts everyone to seriously think about the question of “what is religion” from a neutral position. The author offers a new definition of religion. This definition demonstrates that there is no distinction between primitivism and civilization with respect to religious beliefs. Buddhism believes in causes and effects. Science neither rejects nor testifies the veracity of the law of causation. Catholics believes that God created earth six thousand years ago, a proposition that has been negated by scientists. The theory that Earth began from the Big Bang has been supported by scientific

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Beverley Clack and Brian R. Clack, *The Philosophy of Religion: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 172.

proofs. Catholics have had to alter their wrong views accordingly. But their faith in the eternal creator can be neither attested nor rejected by current science.

We could scrutinize the contradiction between Buddhism and science through examining the distinction between “conditioned phenomena” and “unconditioned phenomena” stated in the Diamond Sutra. Things that arise and cease are called “conditioned phenomena.” The beginningless and endless conditions are called “unconditioned phenomena.” Human intelligence is capable of studying and comprehending conditioned phenomena, but it can only make conjectures about unconditioned phenomena. The Buddha in the *Diamond Sutra* points out that “all sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity”. We realize from this selection that different religions maintain different views on their understanding of the eternal or permanent state. It is impossible for them to reach any conclusions or consensus.

Catholics believe that God could manifest himself as his son, Jesus Christ. This is completely different from the Islamic doctrine of Allah, the one and only God. Humans cannot really make any judgment on unconditioned phenomena, or the so-called eternal or immutable world.

That being the case, religious believers shall keep searching for the Truth. We cannot behave pompously and assume that we have found the Truth. With a humble attitude, followers of different religions will be able to understand that we share the same interest in pursuing the Truth. For this reason, world

peace is not far away.

Religious theories need to be reasonable and compatible with science. We should neither blindly follow nor reject religion that is not negated by science. Science is able to attest conditioned phenomena. It explores the rules of the myriad things in the universe, including the origins of life and celestial bodies. These rules can be called Laws of Nature. Throughout history, humans have continually made new discoveries, which improve the quality of our lives. Undoubtedly, scientific exploration will generate more and more knowledge. It is noticeable, however, that science does not involve in the realm of unconditioned phenomena.

Some religious believers take “faith” as the foundation of a religion. When studying the scientific value of “faith,” we ought to discern whether the subject is “conditioned phenomena” or not. If our faith in “conditioned phenomena” contradicts scientific knowledge, then science will have an advantage. In the past, the present, and the future, this will always be the case. However, when our scientific project involves “unconditioned phenomena,” namely, eternal conditions, we have no experience to draw any conclusions. No one is able to provide a clear answer to even the most basic question: is there anything that is eternal. I consider that freedom of belief shall not be banned amongst legitimate religions, for it is the core of religious freedom. Human wisdom lacks the ability to testify about “unconditioned phenomena.”



## Religion and Harmony

Generally speaking, religion has made a minor contribution to world peace. I use the term “minor” to describe the relationship between religion and peace, because all the religions teach us to admire benevolence and religious main stream thinking does not encourage hatred or strife. However, some religions are exclusive to pagans and hostile to the harmonious ideal of multiculturalism. There is a particular reason why we are less optimistic today compared with the situation a few centuries back when we evaluate religion as an institution to promote peace. (See Appendix - Buddhism: Diamond Sutra and World Peace)

Religion has always played a significant role in politics. And yet, the role of religion has experienced a radical change from the place it had in the past to where it is in the present. Since the introduction of democracy into our political system, there has been a radical change in the structure of society. Democracy in this book refers to the usual political mechanism through which elections are used to choose a country's leaders.

During pre-democratic times, a society consists of two classes, the ruling and the ruled. Typically, the ruling class managed to consolidate their power and maintain social stability through religion.

In an electoral system, a new ruler and ruling group might appear after every election. Consequently, we understand that there is a new social class in the world, which can be called the “rulers-to-be.” Members of this new class are composed of

members of various parties and voters. They are inclined to believe that religion might be able to help them seize political power. A new situation emerges. Because of the emerging new class, we have to ascribe a new “value” to religion that will allow it to take a new role to shape the world. If we expect to solve regional turbulence on earth, we have to consider the consequences brought by the new situation.

The West has been trying to impose the voting system on all the countries in the world. In some countries, voters are comprised of people with different ethnic identities and religions. Ambitious candidates would definitely try hard to woo voters from their own ethnic group who share their religious attitudes. Under such circumstance, ethnic and religious boundaries become sharp. To promote their position, candidates tend to adopt strong attitudes to denounce their opponents. As a result, condemnations, struggles, and deceit would surge. Theoretically, electoral competitions could still be healthy; but it is often not the case in reality. Obviously, the loser and his supporters would not only lose their personal interests, but feel despondent. Accordingly, hatred and antagonism would emerge. The cause behind this hatred is exactly the discriminative mind that Buddhism has asked people to avoid.

Therefore, today’s worldly problem is not about the lack of conversations between religions, nor is it about differences between cultural rituals and traditions. The issue at stake is the elimination of hatred. Political and religious thinkers in this world should figure out how to eliminate the hatred brought by our political systems, and how to prevent religions from being used for ulterior motives. Here I do not intend to go deeper into

this issue, as this is a book about religions and societies rather than about the pros and cons of political systems.

Dialogues between different religious leaders could benefit from the construction of a harmonious society. Provided that they reach a consensus and understand that they belong to a community of common destiny, they could speak up the true causes of afflictions for the world. Furthermore, they could devise plans to end these sufferings. If that is the case, then religious leaders could play a vital role in resolving worldly problems.

### **What can Buddhist teachings do to promote peace?**

Many people believe that Buddhism is helpful in promoting peace, but they rarely engage in any detailed discussion about what Buddhism can do. In fact, if we understand the core values of Buddhism, the answer will come up. We could investigate international affairs from a Buddhist perspective, pointing out what went wrong and why it happened.

The Buddha's teachings continue to be relevant today. Now let us analyze some major world events occurred during the last two hundred years. We will arrange them in a chronological order:

#### **The colonial war launched by the British government**

The First Opium War in 1841 represents a typical case of selfishness. When George Elliot, the chief commander of a British fleet in the Far East ordered military attacks against

Chinese people, he was probably thinking in his head that “If your country bans highly profitable opium (which has been labeled as a kind of narcotic drugs in today’s world) from freely circulating amongst your people, then your government is against the rules of international free trade. You cannot blame me for punishing you with gunboats.” His motive was “greed.” I mention this case not to place blame on any government or people, but to show that humans share the same weaknesses. In today’s world, I suggest that we not focus on condemning any particular government or group of people. Instead, we should endeavour to search for the solution to compelling problems.

### **The two world wars, and especially WWII**

Colonialism in the nineteenth century seized ill-gotten gains. Nazi Germany and Japan imitated other colonial powers to expand their territories and seize resources from other countries. From a Buddhist point of view, this is also avarice.

### **Political structuring of the Middle East after WWII**

Israel was founded in 1946. Its establishment was fine, but the Western superpowers did not help Palestinians establish a similar political structure, nor did they fully consider the interests of Palestinians. This situation in effect made this region very dangerous. Buddhism pursues equality, and Buddhists see unreasonable political structures and ethnic strife as resulting from the “discriminative mind.” The fact that a number of rulers in the world have adopted discriminative policies towards their own citizens as well as foreigners, afflictions keep surging throughout today’s world.

### **The former Soviet Union's dominance over other countries in the name of "Communism"**

The former Soviet Union utilized the system of Communism to control many Eastern European countries during 1946 and 1989, revealing its desire to dominate other countries with its ideology. Buddhism sees this as "avarice" and "delusion." Such desire resulted in the arms race between two superpowers, creating an immensely intense situation in the world. Along with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the crisis finally diminished.

Today, any national leader's indulgence in "craving, aversion, and ignorance" would trigger crisis. If the leader happens to lead a state with nuclear power, then the precariousness of the crisis will draw serious attention. The interests here fall not only on the personal but also on partisan and even national realms. If a political leader's decision making is mixed with craving, aversion, and ignorance, then a crisis will be unavoidable.

### **Terrorism**

What are terrorists thinking? They might think that they and their compatriots are being persecuted, that their beliefs are being suppressed, or that their people being abused. With this in mind, they feel impelled to retaliate against persecutors of these wrongs. They wrongly believe they are righteous in launching terrorist attacks. Resentment ignites their retaliations; delusion makes them indiscriminately slaughter innocent civilians.

To many, this is probably the main causes of terrorism. The real situation is, however, more complex. More importantly, blind faith can lead people to misappropriate God's will, to kill "enemies," and to sacrifice themselves. This is the true cause of terrorism.

Unquestionably, faith could generate matchless power. Counter-violence is unable to tackle this sort of power. The author proposes that we ought to fully comprehend religion, provide opportunities for believers of different religions to communicate with each other, and learn to accept the correct ways to be modern adults in a modern society. This is the real solution to terrorism.

### **Discussions on the relationship between Buddhism and peace**

Through the abovementioned historical examples, we can see how to use Buddhism to investigate complex international affairs of the present day. Indeed, Buddhist theories could contribute to the issue of peace.

Some might question whether it is possible for contemporary people to abandon craving, aversion, and ignorance, even for a short period of time. But if people cannot distance themselves from the afflictions brought by the three poisons, the world will continually face crises. Indeed, civilizations would be at risk for extinction.

Chapter 3 has addressed the similarities and differences between Buddhism and other religions. In any case, Buddhists

will not accept the idea that there is a creator of the universe, who as the supreme god asks its disciples to kill their enemies and sacrifice their own lives. In this regard, Buddhism is markedly different from other religions. The author hopes that people will make an accurate judgment on this point, understand what religions are, and earnestly discuss the ways in which religions could formulate a harmonious society.

Another reason why Buddhism could promote world peace lies in the theory of “one unity perception.” In Chapter 18, we have explored the enlightening subject of “one unity perception”. Buddhism considers that we ought to see the universe and the matters within as one unity. Every one of us is a part of that unity. This concept gives us sufficient reason to protect the natural environment and not kill other forms of life.

Except for Buddhism that encompasses “all sentient beings”, it seems no other religion has talked about protecting other life forms or nature. Scientists have sent out warnings that we are speeding up our journey to the end of world, because we have failed to respect our environment. Global warming and its consequences are an imminent threat. We all know that environmental problems will not be resolved without international collaboration. Since we are able to collaborate on environmental issues, we could see that many other issues are open to international cooperation, through which we could foster a harmonious society.

In his book, Professor Damien Keown expresses the urge for “a systematic updating of the intellectual foundations of the religion [Buddhism] so as to allow a clear and consistent set of

teachings on modern issues to emerge”.<sup>2</sup> He indicates that Buddhism lacks what he calls a logical foundation. If readers agree with the argument I outlined in Chapter 2 (that restoring the intrinsic nature to remove craving, aversion and ignorance is one of the two main ideas of Buddhism), then we could say that Buddhism has already provided a clear answer to contemporary problems. As long as humans are able to distance themselves from craving, aversion, ignorance, discrimination, attachment, and delusion, problems will be readily resolved.

Religions have never existed as some sort of static entity. The majority of the widely recognized religions in this world have existed for over a thousand years. These religions have been and will continue to interact with and have an impact on cultures.

In the river of history, the ruling class has been accustomed to relying on particular religions to consolidate its authority. In this sense, religions have played an indispensable role in the formation of human history. However, as I have explained above in my discussion of the contemporary development of democratic elections, the role of religion has become much more complex. Religions can be readily manipulated by political adventurists for their own purposes. Ambitious politicians often utilize different religions to foster the discriminative mind. Some favor and even encourage non-violent resistance. However, I consider that any form of antagonism is discomforting and perilous.

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<sup>2</sup> Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 123.



We need to acknowledge that any form of antagonism is destructive to constructing a harmonious world. Rationally speaking, we know that if growing dissension spirals out of control, violent conflicts will occur. Leaders of developed countries should not underestimate the wisdom of people from developing countries. Human wisdom is neither predictable nor suppressible. Today, as humans build and possess knowledge to make weapons of massive destruction, including biochemical weapons, conflicts between nations have become even more dangerous. Buddhist theories teach us to abandon discrimination, attachment, and delusion. Without discrimination, there will be no hatred or opposition. If enmity passes down from generations to generations, then their mutual retributions will finally result in an unavoidable catastrophe, according to the principle of cause and effect. We know that such a catastrophe is unavoidable, but we are not sure what will be the trigger.

In today's world where science is flourishing, I feel sad that leaders and scholars have not been able to utilize the "conditioned phenomena" and "unconditioned phenomena" in Buddhism. As long as we understand that followers of different religions are searching for the eternal Truth ("unconditioned phenomena"), then we will be able to dissolve the discriminative mind that estranges people from one another. This is one of the key messages of this book.

## **How would humans in the future see Buddhism?**

How would the future world understand and receive Buddhism? We could respond to this question from three aspects: the individual, other religions, and the government.

### **1. Individual**

When analyzing the reason why an individual believes a certain religion, we might discover correlated factors. Whether an individual follows a religion or not is largely dependent upon:

- 1) the views of one's family members, friends, and other community members;
- 2) the position of the government, regardless of whether it favors or disapproves of the religion;
- 3) the consequences from a materialistic point of view of joining or not joining a religion;
- 4) access to knowing the religion;
- 5) requirements of local laws.

On the one hand, an individualistic view about religion will have a limited impact on its dissemination. On the other hand, external factors play a far more important role in how individuals choose a religion.

In the future, it is likely that Buddhism, or at least its logical basis, will be better understood by people in the world. Because Buddhism is not contradictory to the so-called theory of evolution and other forms of scientific knowledge, we have sufficient reasons to believe that

Buddhism will be regarded as a religion that is logical and compatible to science.

## 2. Other Religions

Whether a religious doctrine is reasonable does not depend on the population of its followers, although many think that the popularity of a particular religion suggests that it is correct. Because of such perceptions, believers of some religion might even disparage other religions. For example, Buddhism is accused of idolatry.

Observing their doctrines, we find that other religions hardly tolerate Buddhism. This position may be very hard to change. Both Islam and Catholicism have firmly made their stance. The first of the Ten Commandments clearly states that “I Am The Lord Thy God. Thou Shalt Not Have strange gods Before Me.” In this regard, Buddhism holds a more tolerant view. I will give some examples to illustrate this point.

Two selections from the *Diamond Sutra* are especially useful here. The first selection is from Section 17. It says: “The Realized One has preached that all dharmas are Buddha-dharmas”.<sup>3</sup> The second selection is found at the end of Section 8. It states that “The so-called dharmas of a Buddha are not dharmas of a Buddha.”<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 6 has made it clear that all dharmas could be the

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<sup>3</sup> 金剛經第 17 分: “故如來說: 一切法皆是佛法。”

<sup>4</sup> 金剛經第 8 分: “所謂佛法者, 即非佛法。”

Buddha-dharma. In other words, there are numerous ways of cultivation.

According to my understanding, we could use a relatively simple way to explain the last selection from Section 8, “The so-called dharmas of a Buddha are not dharmas of a Buddha”. As Buddhism has revealed, the awakened know that everything encountered is illusory.

Nonetheless, in order for those who are unenlightened to understand what is benevolent and what is not, we usually refer to those benevolent behaviours as the “Buddha-dharma” or the “Buddha-way.” Let us put it this way: we are using the concept of Buddha-dharma to promulgate ways to help others attain enlightenment. “Buddha-dharma” is merely a term to guide people towards benevolence. Other terms can be used to describe benevolent behaviour. We shall not care about the label as much as about the real motivation.

When we observe cultivators of other religions teaching their followers benevolence according to their own methods, there is no need for us to criticize them or blame them for not exploring the Buddha-way.

In this sense, Buddhism leads us to take a tolerant attitude that benefits harmonious relations. This is beneficial to constructing a harmonious society that incorporates the perspectives of different religions. Buddhism welcomes intra-religious debates. Its disciples should not feel threatened in the least by other religious theories.

### 3. Government

The methods and attitudes of different governments vary in how they deal with religious activities. These governments can be divided into three categories:

- 1) completely secular governments;
- 2) governments that combines politics and religion;
- 3) governments that are neither completely secularized nor religionized.

The Chinese government belongs to the first type. It provides a political system that recognizes religious freedom and treats major religions equally. But religious activities are governed by one important restriction: no institute or individual can use religion as an instrument to challenge or affect national politics. The rights and obligations of domestic affairs belong to the government, and cannot be compromised. The government has exclusive power to do what it considers beneficial to promoting societal harmony and stability. For instance, foreign institutes such as the Vatican cannot appoint any bishop in China.

Chinese culture emphasizes harmony, encouraging people to “study the underlying principle to acquire knowledge.” Around two thousand years ago, Buddhism was already brought to China from India. Likewise, Islam was well received upon its arrival into China during the ninth century. Similarly, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) introduced Catholicism to China. Chinese culture is not against people with different views, and always advocates the idea that

people with different opinions should be able to live harmoniously. It is said that “Gentlemen seek harmony but not uniformity<sup>5</sup>.”

Some critics of China might say: Communism opposes religion. When did the Chinese government alter this cardinal principle? As an intellectual who lives abroad, I think the situation was radically changed when a pivotal party meeting was held in December 1978. At that time, the Chinese Communist Party established the principle of “seeking truth from facts.” If practical experience shows that people need religious support, then people are free to believe in religions. Therefore, in today’s China, we recognize that the government fully supports religious freedom and offers all legitimate religions equal treatment.

Some Middle Eastern countries in certain periods belong to the second type. Rulers of these governments did not allow any religion but Islam.

Many Western countries belong to the third type. In these countries, people enjoy the freedom of belief. The people in these countries are mainly Protestants. Protestantism originated in Britain. Most American citizens are Protestants. The U.S. government would probably not question a religious designation made by a British bishop. But if some religious leader from a Middle Eastern country designates someone as the administrative authority of

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<sup>5</sup> 君子和而不同.

Islam on American soil and promotes Islam in the U.S., we can hardly imagine how the U.S. government would respond.

What would the future be? Would governments reject or accept certain religions in a more assertive fashion? Would there be any new type of government, aside from the aforementioned ones? Would there be any freedom of religion anymore? Would religious “beliefs” and “activities” be treated differently? Would governmental or civilian organizations conduct any illegal and unwholesome activities in the name of “freedom of religion”? Answers to these questions can only be tested through time.

After examining different governmental policies towards religion, let us go back to exploring the future development of Buddhism. Every government cares about the contribution of religion to society. Buddhist practitioners should learn from the social-welfare initiatives of Catholic and Protestant churches.

More and more people are dedicated to supporting charities through running not-for-profit Buddhist organizations. Successful examples include “Dharma Drum Mountain” founded by Master Sheng Yen, “Fo Guang Shan Monastery” founded by Master Hsing Yun, and “Tzu Chi Foundation” founded by Master Cheng Yen. These organizations deserve our deep reverence. I consider that the government should grant incentives through promulgation of regulations to encourage people to contribute to society in accordance with guidelines.

For certain reasons, the role of monasteries has experienced fundamental changes, especially in China. Many monasteries with historic value need repairs. Subsidized by government, some of these monasteries have been refurbished and turned into popular tourist sites, which still accommodate and support nuns and monks. These monasteries might still function in the future.

Looking into the future, with the convenience brought by information technology, earnest believers of Buddhism just need to establish some small-scale “religious learning centres” with lower infrastructure costs to achieve the same goal of the monasteries. Consequently, a new era of promoting and studying Buddhism will come. These centres could utilize advanced information technology to provide video lectures to practitioners, a move which would be beneficial to promote Mahayana Buddhism, which is considered one of the cultural pillars in China.

The author thinks there is no reason to limit secular practitioners from teaching Buddhism to the masses. Buddhism should emulate other professions by introducing some forms of certification in our society. Buddhist authorities should have a way to ensure the quality of the knowledge and cultivation of Buddhist teachers. Qualified teachers would be expected to be familiar with other religions as well. These teachers shall also enjoy the freedom of common family life. Likewise, missionaries of any other religion should also have some basic knowledge about the five legitimate religions in China.



When studying Buddhist theories, we ought to remember that there is no need to discriminate against any other religion. Preferably we should try to understand other religions and learn to make comparisons between different beliefs. This opens the door to grasping the truth.

In order to realize these outlooks in China or in other parts of the world, I encourage people in modern society to have some basic comprehension of Buddhism. This is the precisely the goal of this book.

## Chapter 25

### Conclusion

This book examines the relationship between Buddhism and modern society. I devote a lot of space to discussing the themes and theories of Buddhism. I attempt to introduce the gist of Buddhism to the readers and more so, to share with others what I have learned from my personal experience and understandings. In the following I will briefly reiterate the key learning points derived from the classical sutras.

1. Buddhist sutras enlighten us to perceive the correct attitude towards life. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* has stated that “The Buddha’s teachings in this world cannot be appreciated without worldly references.”<sup>1</sup>

Problems of various nature can arise in life. On the conscious level, everyone has to overcome difficulties, confront challenges, and improve their living conditions. In light of this, having longings for fame, profit, health, and longevity make complete sense. Generally speaking, these longings are part of living in the world. It would be impossible for Buddhist teachers to ask their sincere disciples to completely abandon worldly things. Even Buddhist monks and nuns cannot wholly ignore worldly demands and concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> 六祖壇經: “佛法在世間, 不離世間覺。”

2. Although we are unable to completely get rid of worldly demands and concerns, we need to recognize the principle of cause and effect, practice morality, meditation and wisdom, and eradicate craving, aversion, and ignorance.
3. One famous quote from the *Diamond Sutra* is worth close examination. “All conditioned phenomena are simply illusions - like bubbles, like shadows, like dew, and lightning. This is the way one should see the conditioned,” says the sutra. Chapter 3 of this book already indicates that we ought to see life as the morning dew, and not attach too much to fame and profit. This quote is extremely meaningful and we should treasure it in our minds.
4. Human life and other things that arise, change, and cease are called “conditioned phenomena” in Buddhism. Conversely, the eternal and immutable conditions separated from arising, changing and ceasing are called “unconditioned phenomena.” According to the *Diamond Sutra*, “all sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity”<sup>2</sup>. My understanding is that all sages of different religions are distinguished by their differentiating understandings of the permanent aspects of eternity. When mentioning conditioned phenomena, this scriptural text already implies its distinction with unconditioned phenomena and the application of the latter in religion.

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<sup>2</sup> “一切賢聖，皆以無為法而有差別。”

Below is an example to illustrate this statement in the *Diamond Sutra*:

Suppose there are two gentlemen: Mr. A and Mr. B. Mr. A has spent money on child support. He has done this because he believes that is within the expectation of an eternal power that governs all sentient beings including himself. Mr. B, on the other hand, has made similar expenditures, but he did it because of legal requirements or other reasons. The former may be a Christian, and the latter perhaps an atheist scientist. As I see it, the behaviours of the two men reflect their different understanding of “unconditioned phenomena,” and furthermore, their different levels of cultivation - just as it is stated in the *Diamond Sutra*.

5. For beginners who would like to gain some basic understanding of Buddhism, recognizing the value of the first three points would be sufficient. People of great virtue and virtuous friends have given an incisive explanation on “conditioned phenomena,” but they have rarely talked about the abstruse “unconditioned phenomena.” It is well known that after Śākyamuni attained Buddhahood, he incessantly lectured on the scriptures for forty-nine years, but the sutras say that the Buddha never taught any Dharma.

As Section 21 of the *Diamond Sutra* asserts: “Anybody who would say such things as ‘The Tathāgata (Buddha) has taught the Dharma’ would misrepresent me, on account of wrong learning.”<sup>3</sup> It also says that “There exists no Dharma

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<sup>3</sup> 金剛經第 21 分: “若人言如來有所說法, 即為謗佛.”

whatsoever which can be apprehended called the teaching of the Dharma.”<sup>4</sup> My own understanding is that anything that involves unconditioned phenomena cannot be uttered. Verbal eloquence alone is not enough to explain the truth of eternity. Practitioners have to walk every step themselves to search for enlightenment.

6. As far as the eternal “unconditioned phenomena” is concerned, Christians have their beloved God. Is there any eternal matter in Buddhism? The answer is yes. Buddhists believe in the existence of “emptiness,” namely, the emptiness of all phenomena mentioned in the *Heart Sutra*. It is neither created nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, and neither increases nor diminishes.<sup>5</sup> This emptiness is the intrinsic nature, thusness, original nature, and the Buddha-nature. Chapter 6 of this book has articulated that human nature is originally pure. People need to train themselves to see their intrinsic nature. Then they could cultivate, practice, and attain Buddhahood on their own. The above are some of my thoughts on the study of Buddhism.

For questions about the future of religion, especially whether or not people should fully negate religious beliefs, have been expounded in the last part of Chapter 5.

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<sup>4</sup> “說法者，無法可說。”

<sup>5</sup> “不生，不滅，不垢，不淨，不增，不減。”

## A Light-Hearted Sense of Joy

Readers have different innate character traits and study skills. I will feel satisfied with the writing of this book as long as readers are able to comprehend the meaning of religion and the two keynotes of Buddhism, including:

- 1) the central theme of Buddhism,
- 2) the outline of cultivation.

In other words, I hope readers could appreciate a set of appropriate conducts of life. The following words could be used to describe the mindset of a cultivator: truthfulness, purity, equality, the right understanding, compassion, to see through things, to cast off attachment, to feel comfortable in spite of such abandonment, to be in accord with circumstances, to remember the teachings of Buddha.

Readers should also keep in mind the insight from the *Diamond Sutra* that encourages “when giving away to help others, there should not be any link or attachment to other considerations”<sup>6</sup>, and “conceiving an aspiration (for giving away) that is not fixed on anything at all”.<sup>7</sup> Such insight has perfectly captured the outline of cultivation.

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<sup>6</sup> 應無所住行於布施.

<sup>7</sup> 應無所住而生其心.

This book also provides abundant materials for Buddhist studies, from which readers could clearly understand the two keynotes and cultivate a correct attitude of life. I sincerely hope readers will benefit from reading the book. If readers resonate with the ideas I lay out here and feel enlightened by them, please carefully store the book and read it again. I hope this book will bring joy to the readers.

## About the Author

Mr. Edward P.H. Woo was born in 1937. He received his education in Hong Kong before proceeding to London to attend law school. Upon his return to Hong Kong in 1962, he started to practice as a solicitor.

In 1969, together with a group of friends interested in finance, Mr. Woo set up the Far East Stock Exchange in Hong Kong. Mr. Woo was also one of the founders of the Commodity Exchange of Hong Kong, serving on the board of the founder company. With his experience in futures trading, Mr. Woo wrote a book entitled *The Winning Art and Logic of Speculation in the Futures Markets*. For many years, Mr. Woo served on the committee of the Far East Stock Exchange and subsequently at the United Stock Exchange of Hong Kong.

In 1979, with another group of friends interested in the promotion of higher education, Mr. Woo set up a private university in Macau called the University of East Asia. The university was converted into a publicly funded university in 1990, and its name was changed to the University of Macau.

In 1992, he became involved with the setting up of the Asia International Open University in Macau (now re-named as City University of Macau). He had served as the Chairman of the Administrative Council and subsequently as the Chairman of Consultative Council, in addition to acting as the director in charge of the Center for Research on Linguistics (Tonal) Studies. Mr. Woo has since retired from all administrative and



consultative capacities save and except in the field of research in the analysis of the tones of languages.

In the 1990s, Mr. Woo invented a system simplifying the process of teaching and learning Cantonese called the “Musical Approach”. Over the years, this system developed and extended into a discovery about the commonality in the tones of different languages spoken around the world. The discovery is known as the “Theory of the Hexatave” or “The 6-tone Concept”. This Theory proposes to supplement the International Phonetics symbols with the Hexatave symbols, and to illustrate the wisdom of the Chinese pinyin system in its universal application in learning languages of the world. Mr. Woo has presented its findings to an international audience at a UNESCO (聯合國教育科學及文組織國際會議) forum for the promotion of world peace. Since then, he has shared the fruits of his research efforts through lectures given at other universities and high schools locally in Hong Kong and Macau. To prove the usefulness of knowing the Theory of the Hexatave, Mr. Woo has written two sets of books, one for helping English speakers to learn Cantonese, know as *SPEAK CANTONESE in 7 Days (2011)*; and the other for helping Chinese speakers to learn English pronunciation known as *Learn English Pronunciation with instant success, 六通英語發音秘笈 (2013)*.

Mr. Woo is also an avid reader in politics, philosophy and Buddhism. Always driven by his attempts to search for a better way of living in this world for the human race, as well as to seek enlightenment on a more spiritual and philosophical level, he is also the author of these books published in Asia and

North America: *In Search of an Ideal Political Order & An Understanding of Different Political Cultures* (2002), *Buddhism: The Big Picture Explained* (2008), *The Core of Oriental Wisdom: Buddhism Explained and Compared with Other Religions* (2008), *淺談佛教 - 分享學佛心得* (2010), *佛學與現代人* (2010), *有為法與無為法* (2015).

Mr. Woo was conferred an honorary doctorate in philosophy by the IMC of London.

Mr. Woo is spending part of his time in Kuala Lumpur.

## **Appendix**

### **Buddhism: Diamond Sutra and World Peace**

Readers who have attended *Buddhism: Diamond Sutra and World Peace*, the first online course scheduled to be offered in 2018 by the Hong Kong University School of Professional and Continuing Education on Coursera may notice that some of the materials from this book also appear in the above course.

#### **Background**

I had the opportunity of discussing religions and world peace with some academia of HKU School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE), an arm of The University of Hong Kong. I explained that I had developed some new ideas surrounding the interpretation of section 7 of *The Diamond Sutra*; and believed that it would be immensely beneficial to promote world peace with such new ideas. Thereupon, members of the HKU SPACE academia expressed interest in the new ideas, an agreement was duly signed for a non-profit joint venture to create an online course. This is how the online course came about.

#### **16 Questions and Answers**

Below are the 16 Questions and Answers I have produced with HKU SPACE in preparation for part of the video presentation in the course.

**1. What do you expect to bring to students through this course?**

The world is in total chaos. Everyone knows it, but it takes deep contemplation to understand the underlying cause of human conflict.

This cause can be analyzed from two different angles: First, we study the hatreds caused by religious divisions. Second, we study the dark side of human nature that fosters discrimination, attachment, and delusion.

We think of religious conflicts such as the crusades as ancient history, yet religious hatred remains, and these conflicts are still relevant today. This course therefore hopes to inform that war or any other form of punitive measures alone cannot possibly put a halt to religious hostility. Rather, we need a framework for peace which is wise, fair and acceptable to all the involved parties.

I have developed this course to offer relevant questions and answers for readers to undertake serious meditation.

**2. What has prompted you to carry out the research on “religion and world peace?”**

Through contemplating the meaning of life, I have gradually realized that giving away to help others is the primary responsibility of being human. I think it would be a great thing to bring forward a proposal to help resolve the chaotic situations in this world.

Anyone who finds any solution should come out and speak up. It has occurred to me that the Buddhist classic *Diamond*

*Sutra* talks about a concept that could potentially help promote peace, so I cannot wait to share it.

### **3. Why do you choose the *Diamond Sutra*? How could it help lead to world peace?**

The *Diamond Sutra* addresses the concepts of “Conditioned Phenomena” and “Unconditioned Phenomena.” Most scholars agree when it comes to what “conditioned phenomena” is about. Simply put, anything which has a beginning and an end is conditioned phenomena. However, it is much more difficult to comprehend the concept of unconditioned phenomena.

During my study of religions, I have sensed that both in Christianity and Islam, God is worshipped as an eternal entity, and thus falls into the category of unconditioned phenomena.

Thinking from this perspective, I realize that the *Diamond Sutra* has provided the most ingenious solution for world peace. Section 7 of the sutra states, “All sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity.”

I try to explain this scriptural text from a new angle. Three points are particularly worthy of our attention:

First, the phrase “all sages and highly respected scholars” refers to all the persons of great virtue in Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam, Buddhism, and any other spiritual culture.

Second, this scriptural text points out that the differing opinions among sages revolve around unconditioned phenomena, the eternal and permanent state. The God (the Holy Father, Jesus) worshipped in Christianity, Allah, the one and only God in Islam, and Heaven and Hell all belong to the realm of unconditioned phenomena.

Third, I think as long as we understood the grand principle stated in the *Diamond Sutra*, we know that religious disputes are utterly unnecessary. The above mentioned scriptural text, simply-put, denotes that all religions are similar, except that their understanding of eternity is separately and distinctively focused. In other words, discrimination amongst religions is totally avoidable because it is not caused by any deep and implacable hatred.

#### **4. How would you define “religion”?**

In this course, we define religion as:

“a philosophy or teaching developed from the belief that the spiritual nature of a person continues to exist after the death of the body and a reward or a punishment is accorded depending on his or her behavior; and through which philosophy or teaching, there are certain guidelines devised for people to follow.”

#### **5. Why do we need to know the definition of religion?**

Because it leads to the understanding that religion itself does not cause hatred.

In the definition of religion, we see that its purpose is to offer people an optimal spiritual sanctuary and entice them

to do good deeds. It never entices people to butcher each other.

Once we understand the definition, we are able to resolve many problems, such as the conflicts and enmities among religions or between religion and science.

## **6. Why would there be dissension among religions?**

We see that every monotheistic religion worships a supreme creator, or simply put “a god”. An undeniable fact is that the existence of the “God” has never been verified by science. If the Christian path to salvation is true, then the Islamic one is false, and vice versa. Consequently, within a rigid faith, believers of a false faith are sent to hell.

A person who absolutely believes in a particular version of salvation would never become true friends with a pagan believer destined for hell. As a result, religious conflicts emerge.

## **7. How do we categorize the infinite universe?**

Everything in the universe can be divided into two categories:

Category one is described as “the transient aspects of matters which, including life, have a beginning and an end.”

Category two is described as “the permanence of eternity”. These, from a Buddhist perspective, are “conditioned phenomena” and “unconditioned phenomena”, respectively, as illustrated in the *Diamond Sutra*.

Section 32 of the *Diamond Sutra* reads: “All conditioned phenomena are just illusions - like bubbles, like shadows, like dew, and lightning. This is the way one should see the conditioned.”

Section 7 of the *Diamond Sutra* states: “All sages and highly respected scholars are different in one aspect, and that is the way they understand or appreciate the permanent nature of eternity.”

**8. How did you come up with this special and interesting concept?**

I did not conceive this method of analysing the conditioned and unconditioned, which has existed in Buddhist sutras for a long time.

My own study has found that the traditional interpretation slightly differs from mine; and because my explanation could be used to advance the establishment of world peace, and thus it is very important.

**9. What is the significance of this categorization?**

The two-tier category of myriad things is significant in that it helps us study controversial issues in a systematic way.

For example, we could study the issues regarding religion and science, recognizing that their subjects belong to two fundamentally different realms, and shall not come into any conflict.



Besides, we could come to realize that unconditioned phenomena are beyond human intelligence. As a result, people would not impose their own interpretation of unconditioned phenomena onto others, because god and the teaching of god which are both eternal, are about faith, not proof. So-called religious freedom is perfectly logical and reasonable.

**10. What makes you believe that this categorization can resolve religious conflicts?**

“Unconditioned phenomena” are eternal and permanent, and cannot be demonstrated or explained through science.

Because unconditioned phenomena are unverifiable, followers of all religions shall honestly acknowledge that we are on the same road searching for the truth, and shall respect rather than discriminate against each other.

**11. What do you think religious believers are pursuing?**

- 1) Simply put, they are searching for confirmation of understanding of the truth which they believe.
- 2) Aside from that, they wish for the help of gods and spirits to assist them in overcoming difficulties in their daily lives. They communicate with gods and ask to be blessed by them.

As a result, we could easily see that a Christian going to a church and a Buddhist attending a temple are more or less the same in meaning albeit different in form.

**12. Do people from different religious groups share any commonality in the things they pursue?**

There are commonalities among them, one of which is to wish for an ideal afterlife.

The existence of religion depends upon the human belief in life-after-death, which is given different names in different religions.

**13. Aside from religious conflicts, there are weaknesses in human nature. How does the dark side of humanity affect world peace?**

Humans are influenced by craving, aversion, and ignorance, which generate discrimination, attachment and delusion.

If a problem is simply caused by the craving, aversion, and ignorance of humanity without any religious involvement, then the problem can be solved through compromise and negotiation.

In contrast, if a problem involves religious factors, it becomes intractable. Believers do not compromise on God.

Take the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians for example. If the two sides were simply fighting to seize control of land without any religious factors, the problem would have a political solution.

For now, we will have to wait for someone equipped with the wisdom to come up with a solution that satisfies the religious dignity of all concerned.

**14. Do you think there is any way to alleviate the conflicts among human beings?**

What is needed is an inquisitive mindset to understand the cause of conflicts.

Here I would like to quote a Buddhist verse, that is “to change delusion into awakening, and to escape suffering and attain happiness.”

We should reflect on problems we encounter and find out their origins before reacting, and always be willing to help others.

**15. What is the importance of almsgiving?**

I think the fundamental meaning of humanity or purpose of life lies in our ability to give away in almsgiving.

Section 4 of the Diamond Sutra says, “when a bodhisattva’s mind is directed to all or any matters, thoughts should be of giving away to help others without any link or attachment to other considerations.”

There are two kinds of almsgiving or giving away to help others: materialistic-donation and dharma-donation.

The *Diamond Sutra* repeatedly enunciates that the merit of materialistic-donation is incomparably greater than that of dharma-donation, a point people often ignore.

Let me give an example to illustrate this point. Assume a certain leader of some state feels that its military power is

so much superior to that of a hostile neighbour that this neighbour can do no harm to his own country in spite of provocation against it, and civil war breaks out in this neighbouring country, causing hundreds of thousands of casualties and millions of refugees. If someone at the relevant time counselled the leader against provoking war by expounding the true meaning of the Buddhist scripture, his act of admonition would be a dharma-donation.

To address the significance of almsgiving, or giving away to help others, we ought to understand that the purpose of life, or humanity, is to freely give away our possessions. If we, and ultimately the society we live in, embrace almsgiving as part of our culture, the world would be a far, far better place to live in.

**16. In the final analysis of the entire course, do you think that human beings will be able to achieve world peace one day?**

Will humans attain total peace some day? It is hard to know. But we all know that some prerequisites exist for this day to come. If these prerequisites appear in time, it is possible for the world to establish lasting peace.

There are two factors in need of consideration:

- 1) The influence of religion in the world.
- 2) The proper ways of dealing with humanity's weaknesses, namely, craving, aversion, and ignorance.

Regarding the first point, people ought to have a correct understanding of religion, especially its purpose.

If we understand the true nature and purpose of religion,

there is no reason why we cannot live harmoniously with people of different religious beliefs.

As to the second point, I think so long as we realize that the purpose of humanity and life is almsgiving, everything could be negotiated and resolved. We need not be too pessimistic.

[For further information about the free online course scheduled to be offered in both English and Chinese, kindly visit: [worldpeacehow.com](http://worldpeacehow.com)]

The electronic edition of this book is available  
at our website:

[WorldPeaceHow.com](http://WorldPeaceHow.com)







